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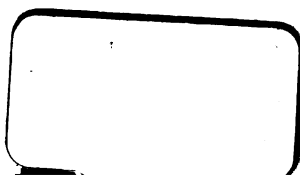
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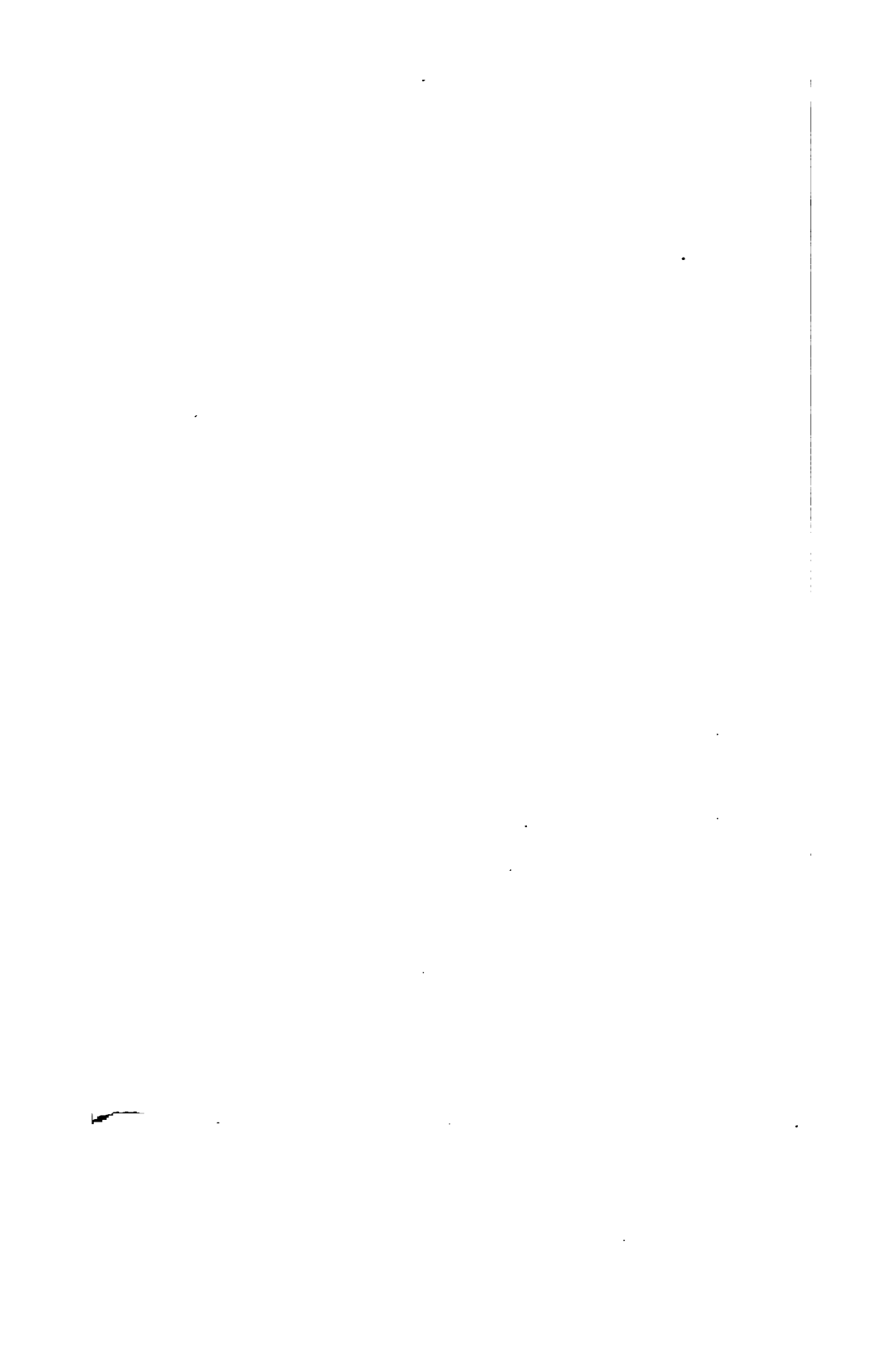




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**FIGHT FOR LIFE.**

LONDON: PRINTED BY  
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE  
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

# A FIGHT FOR LIFE

BY

MOY THOMAS

~~~~~  
*IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME THE FIRST*  
~~~~~



LONDON

SAMPSON LOW, SON, AND MARSTON

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188 FLEET STREET

1868

250. W. 83

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To

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD

In token of

OLD FRIENDSHIP.

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A

# FIGHT FOR LIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ISHMAEL.

It was the hottest summer that had been known in England for many a year. No drop of moisture, except the heavy dew which came down at night and vanished long before late sleepers were abroad, had fallen on the parched earth for seven weeks. On the uplands the grass was scorched as if a whirlwind of fire had passed over it. In the low country about Canvey Island, in South Essex, the long, rank, marsh grass was withered and matted together in patches, where the heat had burnt in to the roots beneath the cracked soil. Trees there were none in that wearisome landscape, save here and there a pollard willow, or an alder, along the side of the dyke that ran in a straight line across the marsh to the creek some miles away, where a barge was slowly moving,

worked by men with poles. There was not movement enough in the air to have carried the lightest thistle-seed away. It seemed as if all herbage and everything that grows for man and beast must perish in the drought ; for the fierce sun still shone down, filling the whole wide flat with its blinding light.

Notwithstanding the heat, a group of labourers were at work far off across the marshes in the open air. They were making an excavation for the foundation of a range of buildings to be used as powder-magazines near the river wall. With the clay cut out of the deep hollow they had formed, they were constructing an embankment, gradually rising from the level of the lowest part of the excavation towards the path along the waterside.

The men were five in number—four labourers and an overlooker, the latter of scarcely any better class than those under his direction. He took a hand like the rest at cutting the clay from time to time, and stacking it in the shallow barrows which are used in this kind of work.

Now and then the men paused in their labour to wipe the streaming perspiration from their foreheads, or to drink at a huge stone bottle, containing thin beer, that stood at the foot of the pathway of planks along which they passed

and re-passed continually, wheeling the barrows up to the height, and depositing the clay upon the highest part of the work.

Of the labourers, three were in the garb of ordinary navvies. Their fustian trousers—which had once been white, but were now clay colour—were tied tightly with strips of rag below the knees, which had the effect of raising the bottoms high above the tops of their clumsy laced boots. Their heads were bare, in spite of the blazing sun. In lieu of braces, they had each tied a twisted handkerchief round the waist. Their huge chests were naked to their waistbands—except the hair which almost hid their tawny skins, covering them like the fur of a wild beast. Two of them wore metal rings in their ears.

The appearance of the fourth man was different from that of his comrades, including the overlooker. His dress had no resemblance to that of the ordinary navvy. His trousers were of canvas, and were wide, like those of a sailor ; but they were of a browner and a coarser material than sailors wear. They were fastened round the waist by a leather belt. Neither the arms nor the breast of this one were exposed, for he wore a sort of canvas shirt, closely buttoned at the throat and turned over in a wide



collar. His feet were quite bare, but his head was covered with a coloured cotton pocket-handkerchief tied tightly round his temples, indicating that he was less accustomed than his comrades to exposure to such a sun.

When this man stood among the rest, it was impossible not to be struck with his appearance. Though not much above middle height, he was taller than any of the others, except the chief of the gang, who was a giant among them. But he was still young—hardly twenty it might have been guessed. His hands were tanned like those of his fellow-labourers; but the skin of his neck and face, though sunburnt, was singularly fair. He wore no beard except the thick stubbly hair which had grown upon his chin and lips from neglect of shaving; and his light hair was cut so closely on his head, that only the smallest sign of it could be traced beneath the handkerchief of which he had made a cap.

It might have been seen at a glance that this man was, in spite of a certain awkwardness, the best workman of the group. His barrow was heavier than that of the others, having been chosen for him by the overlooker, after the cruel custom of their class, by which novices and strangers are subjected to the rudest test

which they can devise of their strength and endurance. But the young man went to and fro even quicker than his comrades. The overlooker and another of the men who were engaged in cutting the soft clay, filled his barrow and beat it down with their shovels until it was impossible to pile it higher; but every time that this man returned, he lifted it with ease, and wheeled it quickly up the plank path, to which his bare feet seemed to cling with a firmness which made his task light. He looked hot and weary, and the great drops gathered on his temples and trickled down his face and neck as with the others; but he rarely paused. While his comrades were bent by habitual raising of weights, he stood erect and firm, not only as, in returning, he drew the barrow after him, but even while pushing it up the incline with its heaviest load.

It was just noon. The tall overlooker drew from the fob of his trousers a heavy, old-fashioned watch, that was attached to a steel chain and a bunch of keys, looked at it, put it back again, and called out in a strong north country accent—

‘Knock off, mates.’

The men needed no second summons. They dropped their shovels, set down their barrows

just where they were, and wiped their faces again with wisps of hay—all except the young man, who tripped faster up the plank, shot his load of clay, and returning with the barrow empty, set it down near the spot where it would have to be loaded after their meal. This done, he walked across to the tall overlooker, and looking him steadily in the face, said—

‘Have I done a morning’s work, master?’

‘Ay, ay,’ replied the overlooker; ‘ye can work, man, if ye like.’

The young man gave his canvas shirt a pull where it was adhering to his skin with the perspiration with which it was saturated.

‘Only give me a chance, and you shall see,’ he replied, smiling. ‘But I’d work better if we could get a breath of air, or just a bit of cloud in the sky.’

The fine face of the speaker looked finer by contrast with that of the overlooker. The features of the latter were hard and coarse. He had high cheekbones, and his face was seamed with the smallpox so much that it had destroyed all traces of his eyebrows. His jaws projected so far that his double row of yellow teeth were always visible. His short, curly black hair was pretty thickly sprinkled with grey, and his whole appearance was that of a

man whom hard work had marked with premature age.

‘What’s your name, man?’ asked the over-looker.

‘Ishmael.’

The man laughed.

‘That’s a queer un,’ he said.

‘One nickname is as good as another,’ replied the young man sharply.

‘It’ll do,’ said the taller man; ‘come in here.’ The overlooker led the way into a little wooden hut, such as excavators keep their tools in, and which served as a sort of office, in which there was a desk with pens and ink. Here he wrote the name ‘Ishmael’ in a long book, which was used to record the men’s time of labour.

‘Have ye any food?’ asked the overlooker.

‘No,’ replied the young man, pulling a canvas bag from the pocket of his shirt; ‘but I’ve a trifle of money.’

‘You won’t want it—you can’t spend much hereabouts,’ said the overlooker. ‘I keep the Tommy shop, and score up till wages time. Ye’ll take a drink of beer outside. Will ye have a loaf?’

The young man nodded.

‘And a bit of cheese maybe?’ asked the

man, speaking out of the depths of a great chest which he had unlocked.

The young man took the loaf and cheese, thanked the overlooker, and went out. The other labourers had sat down in a row alongside the wooden hut, which cast a strip of shade upon the ground, and afforded them a slight shelter from the dazzling rays of the sun ; but the man who had called himself Ishmael walked up the steep rise and took his place high up on the bank. Here there stood a stack of bricks, poles, and planks, which had been landed from some barge. The young man sat down on the turf beside it, where he could command a view of the river and the marsh, and there ate his loaf and cheese, out of hearing of his companions, cutting large hunches with a long clasp-knife which he had kept slung round his neck, and stuck into the waistband of his trousers.

Who was the man who called himself by a strange name? What countryman was he? Why was he in such miserable clothing? What had he been doing for a living before he came there, and what made him take to the hard work of a navvy in that broiling sun, which might have been supposed enough to kill any

man who had not been bred and born to it? These were the questions which the three men and the overlooker sat discussing in their way, out of hearing of the object of their conversation.

‘Some gaol-bird, I tell ye,’ said one of the speakers; ‘I didn’t like the look of ’m when he come here askin’ for a job.’

‘Hold thy tongue, Dick,’ said the overlooker, with an oath. ‘Thou’st always a bad word for everybody.’

‘He works like a man,’ remarked another, with that admiration of mere strength which their class always show.

‘So he do,’ said the other. ‘Make ’m pay his footin’ wages day, and give ’m a fair chance, say I.’

‘Who said he wouldn’t give ’m a fair chance?’ asked the first man sulkily. ‘But what’s he sit up yonder for? Aint we as good men as he any day?’

‘Thou’rt a fool, Dick,’ interposed the overlooker: ‘thou wast always a fool, and a fool thou’lt be to the end of thy days.’

Having delivered himself of this comprehensive view of Dick’s character, the overlooker rose and locked the door of the little office, with a care which looked as if he was not quite con-

vinced, after all, of the incorrectness of Dick's estimate of the stranger.

Meanwhile, the brief meal-time had come to an end, the men had drained the great stone bottle; the stranger who had afforded so much ground for discussion came down from the height, and the work went on as before. It might have been noticed as a peculiarity of the men, that although they talked enough at other times, they were always silent while engaged in labour. It seemed as if the hardness of their toil and the great heat left them no inclination even for the fatigue of speaking. The strike of the shovel in the clay, the hollow sound as they patted it flat upon the barrow, and the rippling noise of the iron wheels as they rolled up and down the worn planks, were almost the only sounds that were audible for some hours.

If the man who called himself Ishmael had sat on the high bank about an hour before sunset, gazing as he had gazed across the interminable flat, it is probable that he would have seen something that would have attracted his attention.

Near the spot where the excavation was making was a road, or rather track, extending from the foot of the river embankment in a

straight line, until lost in the distance far across the marsh. It had been used as a cartway for conveying chalk from a temporary landing-stage on the river-side, up into the main road far away ; but was now so little frequented, that the rank grass, and mallows, and thistles had overgrown the deep wheel-ruts of the last winter, now baked by the sun to the hardness of stone. The lines of these ruts alone enabled the eye to trace the road almost to the horizon's verge.

It was in this road or track, that about this time two dots appeared moving in the far distance. They might have been observed for nearly an hour before it could have been determined whether they were the forms of human beings or not ; and even then, it would have been hard to say whether of men or boys. They came straight on—slowly, but steadily—never stopping for a moment, even in that heat. As the figures grew more distinctly those of two men, the new comers parted company, and made a rather long sweep, as if they had agreed to meet at the other side of the excavation.

No one of the group of labourers had seen them. They came noiselessly round, as Ishmael passed down into the hollow with his barrow, and took their station on each side of the plank path.



As the young man turned again to wheel his loaded barrow up the embankment, a faint cry escaped from his lips ; he dropped his burden with a haste that overturned the load, and shrinking back, laid his hand on the overlooker's arm.

‘ Who are they yonder ? ’ he asked.

The overlooker looked up, and answered—

‘ Strangers. ’

The young man glanced hurriedly around. There was a wild look in his face which could not be mistaken. The two men were in quest of him.

The sides of the excavation were high and perpendicular. There was but one exit from the place, which was by the path of planks ; and his pursuers were there waiting, as if they felt too secure of their prey to hurry the capture. Escape seemed hopeless, but the young man ran twice round the hollow square, scanning its sides and glancing restlessly at the sky like a wild beast before it has learnt the strength of its cage. Then he looked towards the men again, who, now alarmed by his movements, descended into the hollow.

The young man was closed in like a rat in a trap, but it was evident from his gestures that there would be trouble yet. He planted his

back against the wooden hut, and drawing his long clasp-knife, opened it with an audible click of its spring back which indicated his determination to resist.

‘Come on,’ he shouted, as he grasped the handle till his knuckles were white as he held the blade close to his side; ‘a hundred shall not take me alive.’

The two men who were dressed in the garb of field labourers, made a movement as if to rush upon him there, but the navvies and the overlooker, who had gathered round, interposed between them.

‘Stay there, men,’ roared the giant overlooker, in a tone that showed his determination to be obeyed. ‘What dost want with the lad?’

‘We have a warrant for that man’s apprehension,’ said the spokesman angrily. ‘You had best not interfere.’

‘Ye shan’t take a mate of ours without good cause, warrant or no warrant,’ replied the overlooker doggedly. ‘What’s he done? Is he a thief?’

‘Ay, ay,’ interposed one of the navvies, ‘that’s the question. Is he a thief?’

‘He is more than a thief,’ replied the spokesman, who was himself a man of a powerful

frame. 'Stand aside. Edward Carrell, you are my prisoner.'

The man who had spoken of his comrade some time before as a gaol-bird shook his head, but the others stood firm.

'Ye'll not take him,' said the overlooker, 'till I've asked him a question. We're more than two to one of you, and won't see murder done for nothing.'

Then, holding off one of the men forcibly with his huge, brawny arm, he turned half round to the young man and said—

'Is't true? Are ye a thief? Just tell me that.'

'They know very well I'm no thief,' replied the young man hurriedly. 'They daren't tell you what I am; but my story's simple enough. Look you here, comrades; it's the fate of many a poor fellow, and may be yours one day; I'm a deserter from the Dragoons, that's what I am. I didn't desert until they drove me to it; but that's no matter. If they could take me they'd cut the heart out of me with the cursed lash that makes a man something worse than a thief. They took me once, but they couldn't keep me. They have hunted me for many a day, but there'll be blood shed, I tell you, before they take me again.'

The young man tore open his canvas shirt, exhibiting a letter D marked in blue dots upon the skin of his broad breast, which was white as that of a fair woman.

‘If you doubt me,’ he said, ‘look here.’

The sympathies of labouring men under the old cruel system were always with a deserter. The two officers well knew this, and had evaded the question of his crime ; but the young man’s manner and the mark upon his breast convinced his companions of the truth of his statement.

‘I’ll tell ye what,’ said the overlooker, planting himself more firmly still in front of the two officers, while his men gathered behind him ; ‘give him a chance. A fair start on the way, and take him if you can. But you shan’t fight here.’

The young man whom the officers had called Carrell did not wait for the completion of this appeal. Marking his time well, as the officers and the men were engaged in this altercation, he suddenly doubled upon them, sprang upon the planks, rushed up the unfinished clay embankment with the swiftness of a deer, and dashed across the open country.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE PURSUIT.

ONCE out of the deep hollow in which all hope of escape seemed to have been cut off, the young man's spirit rose within him. He was hot, and dusty, and weary with the day's toil ; but he had been accustomed to win easy victories in contests that required strength and endurance, and it seemed to him as if to have broken away from his pursuers was to be already free. He heard a noise like that of a sharp struggle behind him, the shouts and yells of the overlooker and his labourers, excited by the spectacle of his flight, and finally, without looking back, he became conscious that the two officers were already on his footsteps.

He avoided the cart track which led towards the main road. His only chance of escape lay in tiring out his pursuers by keeping his way in the open plain, where happily there were none to assist in capturing him. Except a few cattle in the distance, no sign of life was visible in that direction far and wide.

At first he held his course close under the steep bank which concealed the river from the side of the marshes ; then he diverged a little, choosing the rougher ground of the open country. It was a race for life. At the worst, he could turn upon his pursuers and fight for it. They were two to one ; but he was a desperate man. Their motive was the mere habit of duty, or the hope of a miserable reward ; while the spirit which would nerve his arm was the fixed determination never to be captured alive, which had sustained him through all the misery and privation which he had brought upon himself. The black hole and the lash were to him infinitely worse than death ; why, then, should he fear them, when it would be so easy to die ?

Sometimes he slackened a little to listen, and then it seemed to him as if the footsteps were nearer. But whether they gained on him or not, they came on with a steady, regular tread, which struck his imagination like the relentless progress of fate itself. It was evident that his pursuers were endowed with a fortitude and endurance equal to his own. It was probable, indeed, that they had been chosen for this duty for that very reason. The conviction grew upon him that it would be impossible to elude

them by flight. There seemed but one hope. The sun was setting, the approaching dusk might favour him; but the sky was without a cloud, and the twilight on such evenings lingers long. In an open level country objects can be distinguished on ordinary nights at a considerable distance. If there had been any house, or wall, or even a clump of trees near, it might have helped him to screen himself from their sight for a moment, and finally, perhaps, to throw them off the scent; but the flat landscape was broken only by the dry ditches, an occasional culvert, a gate, or the short white posts here and there which marked the boundary of some parish, or the extent of some grazier's property.

The strength of the fleetest runner is expended at last. His pursuers seemed to have paused to take breath. It was a momentary respite, but Carrell was himself too exhausted to go on. The harsh grass, the brambles, and the rugged soil of the fields, had torn his naked feet, until his course might almost have been tracked in marks of blood. His thirst was intolerable; his eyeballs were hot and throbbing, every muscle in his body was strained. Once he tripped upon a stone and fell, and it was with difficulty that he rose again. Just before him was a deep

watercourse. It was dry, and full of withered flags like the rest, but in order to cross it, it would have been necessary to descend the bank and scramble up on the other side again. He knew that his strength would not suffice now for such a task, and he turned a little, following the course of the trench till he came to a brick arch, where there was a gate painted white.

If his pursuers had not been exhausted like himself, this check might have proved disastrous. But they still delayed. The gate was closed with an iron staple and ball, and he clambered over it with difficulty. As he descended on the other side, and leaned upon it to recover himself, he shuddered on observing that the bars where his feet had touched them were smeared with blood.

In all this time, so intent had he been on the one purpose of out-distancing his pursuers that he had never paused to look back. He could now plainly see the figures of the two officers at a distance of scarcely five hundred yards. All the efforts he had made had not succeeded in placing any greater distance between them since the moment when they had started in pursuit, and it was evident that one of them at least was preparing to renew the



struggle. The taller of the two seemed to be divesting himself of his jacket and some other part of his clothing, which he handed to his companion, who was seated on the ground. Carrell observed him anxiously, and soon perceived that henceforth the contest would be with the taller man only.

It was probable that this man was armed; but Carrell had still his long clasp-knife. His strength was returning, and his spirit was not conquered yet. He would gladly have staked his life and his chance of freedom upon a hand-to-hand struggle with both of his pursuers; it seemed to him, therefore, an easy matter to encounter one. Even if his antagonist had fire-arms, as was most likely, the case was not desperate. A pistol fired in a scuffle will as often as not miss its mark. Besides, if he had an opportunity of closing with him such a weapon would be useless.

Often, when he had looked forward to this final struggle, the thought had flashed through his mind that murder would be done before he succeeded in escaping. He had thrust the idea aside, as men will do who dare not sound the depths of their own hearts on some question that concerns them. Even during the agony of that long flight he had shrunk from the

idea of bloodshed. As yet his offence was one which the world—or at least all that portion of it which is outside the mess-room and the barrack-yard—looks upon with no great repugnance. The case would have been widely different if he had turned and slain one who, as men say, was but doing a duty. He had suffered from tyranny and persecution—had led the life of a hunted beast rather than that of a man; but the sense of the sacredness of human life which is an instinct in all but the most desperate criminals, was still unextinguished in his soul. Come what might, he would shed no man's blood if he could avoid it. The possibility of having to fight for freedom had indeed been present in his mind, but it was rather an idea of a trial of strength—a vague notion of a sharp struggle to throw off his pursuers, in which, if need be, he could by his own death, rather than by theirs, escape from his miseries for ever.

All this had passed in a confused way through his thoughts again and again in that long flight. But he was conscious now of a change in his feelings towards his pursuers. The obstinacy with which they tracked him down, the determination which they showed to arrest him at any cost, and hand him over to his persecutors,

had awakened a feeling of hatred in his heart. What had he done to them that they should seek to destroy him? Was their lot in this world so happy that they should take part with the rich and the oppressor—with the class who monopolised all the honour and glory of a soldier's life, and consigned the poor private to the harsh usage of subordinates and the prospect of the lash? Was the system of tyranny so perfect that every man became a ready tool to work out its commands? the power of his enemies so subtle that it could find him out and crush him even in that solitary place?

He knew nothing of the country about him. The spot where he had worked that day—the deep excavation, the embankment, and the river wall—seemed to him already many miles behind. Before him the great level stretched far away as if it would never end, but in the direction of the river his eye caught a long dark line, looking like a new plantation of shrubs. It appeared to keep for some distance near to the embankment, and then by degrees to extend into the country. He observed it, and fancied that there was a road or causeway there, bordered by dwarf trees. It was begin-

ning to get dusk, so that he could not be sure ; but any break in the monotony of the landscape offered a new hope of escape, and he determined, as a last effort, to shift his course a little and make for this point.

His movement did not escape the eye of his pursuer. Carrell heard his voice as if shouting to him to surrender, but the words were lost in the noise of his own footsteps. The man seemed to pursue him now with greater energy, but the deserter, too, had gained breath. Carrell fancied that he could hear him climb over the gate and spring to the ground on the other side ; but he kept on as before, without looking back.

He was approaching the long line which he had observed. He had crossed other ditches and a roadway, and had entered a district which seemed less wild. There were shrubs here and there—clumps of willow and sloe bushes, but soon after this a new misery assailed him. The part of the marsh in which he was had been an osier plantation. The osiers had lately been cut down, and the sharp stumps which covered the ground at only a few paces apart pierced his naked feet, and caused him to stumble at nearly every step. The pain which he suffered was intolerable, and it seemed

impossible to make his way further in that direction.

He stopped and drew breath. 'If we must fight,' he thought, 'why not here?'

He drew his clasp-knife, opened it again, felt the point, and fixed it firmly by the spring in the back.

But a sensation of giddiness came over him. The air was full of indistinct noises; the bushes round about him seemed to move in a wide circuit, as if he was being carried through them at a great speed. He felt faint, but he recovered himself by an effort. The idea of his strength failing him was horrible. His thirst for revenge upon his persecutor seemed to nerve him in spite of all. He was brave, and his temper was naturally sanguine:—

'Let me keep my right arm free for a moment,' he muttered savagely, 'and I will cure this fellow of his taste for hunting men.'

When the dusk of evening is approaching, the way we have travelled looks always darker than that which lies before us. Twilight seemed to him to have come on with a strange suddenness. He fancied that he could hear his pursuer's footsteps still as he turned and stared into the gloom, but he could not get rid of the notion that there was some object standing be-

tween them. It was like the figure of a woman in dark clothing, and with hands raised aloft, as if to warn him from turning back. It could only have been the fancy of a brain overwrought by heat and fatigue, but in his eyes it grew more distinct each moment as he gazed towards it. The form seemed familiar to him, as of one who had loved him well, but whom death had long since taken away. A singular kind of awe crept over him as he turned again, half mechanically, to continue his struggle.

The apparition was one of good omen. The stumps in the field disappeared, and he came upon a part of the plantation which was still uncut. He had gained the line of rising ground which he had noticed, and climbing up it, found that he was upon the bank of a wide creek which wound far away through the marsh towards the river.

There was not a barge or sign of any other craft at hand, and the sides of the creek, which were almost perpendicular, were overgrown with osiers and tall water-flags. Carrell ran swiftly along the bank, looking for an opening by which he could approach the water, but he found none.

There was a crackling of boughs in the plantation behind him. To anyone there his figure

must have been plainly visible on the high bank against the evening sky, for it was still twilight. He heard a hoarse voice calling on him to surrender.

‘You run well,’ said the voice, ‘but it’s all up. I am armed, and will shoot you like a dog if you resist me.’

Carrell did not catch the officer’s last words. He had made up his mind to swim the creek. He leaped down among the osiers, forcing a way through the water-flogs; here he found the mud comparatively hard and dry, and plunged into the water almost from its brink, and without much noise. The distance across was not great, and there was no stream to distress him. He swam well, and his naked feet and scanty clothing made it easier for him to keep himself afloat.

He heard no more of his pursuer now. Whether his boast of being armed were a mere threat or not Carrell did not know, but there came no pistol-shot. One thing was certain, the officer had not ventured to follow him. On the opposite bank at least there was liberty and respite for awhile. At some distance before he reached the shore he felt the ground with his feet, and waded. The bank was, like the other, overgrown with high grass, and had

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a plantation of willows behind it. As Carrell came ashore he broke a way through these, and crept up the slope; thence he descended again into the marsh, and throwing himself upon the ground, burst into a low hysterical wail, the result of his long excitement and fatigue.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE RIVER.

HALF an hour had elapsed before he arose. How far up the creek a man might wander before he would come to a bridge, or a ferry-boat, or other means of crossing, it was impossible to guess; but the darkness which had now spread over the country favoured him, and he felt pretty sure that his persecutors would not continue their pursuit. It was a lovely night. The stars were beginning to twinkle to the eastward; the coolness was refreshing, even though his clothes were still wet with the waters of the creek. His fatigue seemed to have passed away, and except the wounds on his feet, which compelled him to limp, he felt but little effect now from his long flight.

It would have been hard for most men to keep up their spirit in such circumstances; but Carrell was not easily cast down. His position was forlorn indeed. To make his way towards the high road would have been certain to lead

to his capture as soon as it was day. He was without shoes or cap, and his appearance could not fail to attract attention. The officers would certainly describe him, and would easily get information from some toll-house, or cottage, or roadside inn which he might pass. To go that way even by night would be almost equally dangerous; and the necessity for getting food would compel him to show himself in some town or village. The case seemed hopeless; it was hopeless for any but a desperate man.

He followed the creek pretty closely towards the point where it entered the river, impelled by a vague feeling that if he would escape it must be somehow in that direction. He descended into the marsh again, and came once more to the foot of the grassy slope which led up to the path-along the river side. As he was about to ascend this slope he started at observing the figure of a man slowly rising from the other side of the embankment. Carrell crouched down and held his breath, for the stranger was but a few yards from him. He was evidently making his way over shingle and rough stones up on to the bank, where he paused awhile and looked around him. Carrell fancied that he stared for some time in his direction, but the man finally walked on. Following the path

which was parallel to the river, he came to a stile, which he mounted, and rested for awhile on the top bar. Looking upward, he could plainly discern the outline of his figure as that of a man in the uniform of the Coast-guard Service.

Carrell knew that if he had not been observed the man would soon pass on ; but how long his beat was, or what length of time he might reckon on his being absent, he could not tell. It was a relief to him when he heard the coast-guard man carelessly whistling an air. Presently the man went on his way. Carrell listened until he could distinguish his footsteps no longer, and then crept up the bank and walked over sand, and drift, and stones down to the water's edge.

It was but a short space, for the tide was already high, and was rising fast. He sat upon a little ridge lined with stakes, of which there were several at irregular distances, placed there to resist the wearing effect of the waves in rough weather. There was a tranquil beauty in the scene, which he felt in spite of his distress. The smooth surface of the river glimmered with a faint white light reflected from the evening sky. Far away under the opposite shore several coal-brigs were moored, standing high out of the

water, as if in ballast. Behind them some huge, unsightly craft, with its machinery for raising sunken vessels, reared a spectral shape against the sky. About the middle of the river, as it seemed to him, a sailing barge, with her mast lowered backwards almost level with her deck, lay quietly at anchor, waiting for the turn of tide.

He contemplated the scene for some time, bent low, with his elbows on his knees, and his chin resting on his hands. Far away—for the river was very broad here—he could see the low line of the opposite shore, with the hills beyond. What if he could only reach it? It seemed to him that to have put the river between himself and his persecutors would be to escape for ever. They would, indeed, little suspect that he could have crossed in the night to the Kentish side, and once there, he might find some concealment for awhile. His power of swimming had already stood him in good service; it was no wonder that he thought of it again as yielding a chance of escape.

But the distance was great. How could he hope that his strength, worn down by fatigue and want of food, could hold out for such a labour? Distances on the water easily deceive. For aught he knew, the opposite shore might

be much further than it seemed. The smooth and silent river was tempting ; but it tempted him the way to death. What could he expect after the exhaustion of that day, but that he should struggle on until his little stock of strength would be expended, and the waters close over him in midstream ?

The fact that it was near high water made the river at its broadest. Even while he had sat there the water had crept up to his feet, and compelled him once to change his place, and now it had approached his resting-place again, and was lapping round the stone on which he sat, and running with a gurgling sound into the channels worn by the water in the slimy grass. A steam-vessel, with a dark hull, leaving a long trail of smoke as it crept under the opposite shore, sent a length of wave along the beach which compelled him to retreat nearly to the pathway above. When the water had subsided, and the vessel had disappeared, in the next reach he perceived that the river was already as high as the furthest point that had been swept by the swell. The turn of tide could not be far off.

Carrell still gazed at the long line of the opposite shore. To him it seemed the boundary of a happy land, where, if some kind power

would waft him thither, he might at last find peace and rest. He stood upon the bank and looked far and wide, in the hope that some skiff might lie moored there, which he might seize to paddle himself across. But the place was wild and desolate ; it was little likely that any one would leave a boat there, and indeed he could see none.

The time had come when he must act. The coast-guard man would probably return before long. It was now very nearly high water, when, if the distance across was greater, there would, he knew, be scarcely any current to distress him. The great full moon was rising, a disc of tarnished gold, across the heat mists that hovered over the fields. In an hour he knew that the moonlight would make it almost as bright as day, which would perhaps encourage his pursuers to renew their search. It was, indeed, probable that he would never reach the opposite side ; but look at it how he would, he knew well enough that there was no other chance of escape. Death stared him in the face ; but behind him hovered a phantom still more terrible.

His mind was made up. The scanty clothing that he wore offered, as he knew by experience, little impediment to swimming. He tucked his

trousers above the knees, and rolled the sleeves of his canvas shirt as high as he could, to give free play to his arms. But he had not calculated the effects of the trials and fatigues of that day in diminishing his strength. As he rose to take to the water, he became conscious again of a certain stiffness of the limbs which compelled him to pause. His spirit was unbroken, but the painful truth forced itself upon him. It was impossible that he could hold out for so long a distance.

There was yet another alternative. The long barge that lay at anchor, distinctly visible in all its outlines, seemed about midway in the stream ; but the perspective made it probable that the distance between it and the opposite shore was far greater than it seemed. To reach this barge, therefore, would be comparatively easy. Some excuse might tempt the man in charge to take him aboard, and then to carry him to her destination, where escape would be easier. It was a wild scheme, but it was not altogether hopeless. He could distinctly see the man aboard drop a bucket or some other article into the river as he stood upon the poop, and could even perceive the ripple that this made upon the smooth surface of the river. This little fact was encouraging. It seemed to give him a

clearer notion of the task before him than any other sign he had perceived. He delayed no longer, but dropped into the water, now level with the highest ridge of stakes, and pushed out into the stream with long strokes.

At first he swam with more strength than he had expected. The water seemed to invigorate him again. After awhile he rested a little by floating, and husbanding his strength carefully ; and he could already perceive little objects about the vessel which were not visible before, such as the tiller, some ropes and chains, a stove-pipe, and a boat made fast to her stern, which the shadow of her high rudder had concealed from him.

Suddenly a sound came across the water which smote him like his death-knell. It was the clank of the windlass, and the 'yehoy' of the man aboard, who was raising her anchor to take advantage of the ebb, and drift down the river. Carrell might have known that the bargeman would prepare to depart at the exact moment of high water, but the thought had not struck him until now. It was too far to turn back ; yet the barge would drift away before he could reach her, and the great distance of the opposite shore was apparent to him now,



for the low line, in spite of his swimming, seemed as far as ever.

He shouted 'Help!' as loud as he was able, in the hope of attracting the man's attention; but the word, even if it reached so far, must have been lost in the noise of the windlass. The sound came again and again across the waters—

'Clank, clank!'

'Yehoy, 'hoy!'

The swimmer had only weakened himself by the exertion, and was compelled to float again for a little while to give himself rest.

He could feel already that the tide had turned. The barge was moving, but the stream which carried it down, instead of aiding, only obstructed him, for he had to swim across the current. As he turned over to continue the struggle, he could see the man still busy at the windlass; he was now raising the mainsail to catch such little air as the evening might bring. The measured clank and the man's cry seemed endless; but Carrell knew that it would be of no use to endeavour to attract notice until he had done.

His only hope now lay in a determination to put forth all the strength that remained to him. He struck out boldly again, but after a dozen

strokes he was compelled to relax and to drift. A strange kind of weakness seemed to rise from his chest to his eyes, and thence to his head. The clanking had ceased now, and he cried again—

‘ Help ! ’

But his voice had become weaker, and it brought no response.

He repeated his cry, but his voice had become weaker still. He drifted helplessly now, with a curious singing in the ears. Then the singing in his ears was changed to a noise like the sharp, snapping bark of a dog. Once he was aware that he was sinking, but by an almost unconscious effort he struggled to the surface again, and again he kept himself afloat.

A sensation as of a craving for rest—a longing, as it were, to give up the struggle, and to sink down, down into the quietude of death—crept upon him. The tide which carried him onward seemed like a gentle hand leading him along an easy pathway into a land of sleep. There was no distinction now of sky, or river, or shore, but only a dim dusk, crossed now and then by little flickering fires. All that day of agony, all that he had suffered since he had been a fugitive and an outcast, had become a

something remote and indistinct, and in its place trivial recollections of bygone times haunted him. But these were few. Consciousness was fast departing, but the young and strong die hard, and cling to life to the end.

The barking noise that he had heard was no fancy of his brain. It came from aboard the barge, where a little terrier, with quicker ears than those of his master, had caught the sound of Carrell's voice, and was running to and fro, between bow and stern, barking incessantly. The man in the barge dropped a great oar that he had shouldered, and hastening to the poop, looked across the stream.

The level moonlight was just beginning to touch the water where the young man floated still, and the bargeman could plainly discern something dark on the surface. In an instant he hauled up his boat, sprang into it, and let her adrift. Then he took a couple of sculls, and pulled direct for the object.

'Keep up a minute,' cried the man, as he drew nearer; but Carrell did not hear him.

In a moment or two the boat was near the swimmer; and the bargeman held out a scull. Carrell clutched it with the instinct of a drowning man.

‘Hold hard to that, and get breath,’ said the bargeman.

Carrell felt relief, and after a while muttered feebly—

‘Thank you.’

‘Capsized?’ said the bargeman. ‘Deary me: it’s a wonder I didn’t hear you. Where’s your boat?’

Carrell was too weak to reply. After awhile, the bargeman helped him to seize the gunwale of the boat, while he lay back on the other gunwale to give it balance. In this way, after many efforts, he hauled him into the boat, where Carrell dropped down to rest in the stern.

The man pulled in silence, and in a few minutes they were alongside the barge.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE BARGE.

CARRELL remembered no more of that night, except being lifted by more than one man out of the boat, and sinking down to rest again somewhere, until he awoke and found himself in a little square cabin, where a woman was busy cooking at a fire. He was lying on a mattress placed upon a sort of ledge, which served as a sleeping-place for the bargeman and his wife when a calm or an adverse tide afforded them time for the luxury of rest. The heat of the place was intolerable; for the fire was in a stove which stood out in the middle of the cabin, with a tube that ascended through a hole in the deck. There was a hanger in front of the fire, on which stood the kettles which the woman was watching. Carrell turned uneasily on the ledge, which attracted the woman's notice.

‘Do you want anything?’ she asked.

‘Nothing, thank you,’ he replied faintly, ‘unless you could give me a little air.’

‘Ay, yes,’ said the woman, in a kindly voice.

‘You find it hot, don’t you? We are used to it, you know. There isn’t much room in a barge, young man; but it is close to-night, to be sure, and thunder not far off, I reckon.’ Then, looking up the cabin stairs, she called sharply, ‘You Jem, stand out of the gangway there, and steer her properly. Do you want to stifle people?’

Carrell heard a shuffling noise, and then became sensible that some obstruction to the entrance of air had been removed. He felt relieved a little, though weak.

‘You had best lay quiet,’ said the woman. ‘I’ve seen a good many that have been overboard. Rest and a dry shirt is what you want. You twisted your arms so that my master and Jem together couldn’t change it. Do you think you could change it now?’

Carrell thanked her, and murmured, ‘In a little while.’

A wet shirt was too familiar to him to seem worth the effort of rising to change it.

When he awoke again, the woman gave him some soup which she had been preparing in one of the kettles. Carrell took it eagerly, and felt refreshed. After awhile his kindly nurse left him to change his shirt for one belonging to her husband. It was rougher even than his own; but it was clean, and the change was soothing. He

cast his own shirt on to a stool, where it would dry by the ashes of the fire, which the woman, now her cooking was at an end, had suffered to drop out. The effort exhausted his little stock of strength, and he sank back again upon his resting-place, and after awhile fell once more into a deep sleep.

When he awoke again, the flame of the oil-lamp that hung by a chain from the roof of the cabin looked pale, and turning on his mattress, he found that the daylight was already streaming through the aperture at the top of the stairs. There was a clanking as of chains, and a noise of footsteps on the deck overhead. Then he became sensible that the barge had come to a stop, and there was a harsh noise, as if the ripple that had been made in moving the vessel caused her sides to grate against the edge of some landing-place.

The noise overhead continued for a long time after this. Carrell lay awake listening to it, and watching the dancing motes in a long bar of sunlight that traversed the cabin from the stairs nearly to the foot of his sleeping-place. He was startled by a voice that sounded to him like something he had heard in his dreams. It was the cheery tone of the bargeman, asking if the young man was awake.

Carrell answered him, and the bargeman descended the stairs.

‘Deary me,’ he said, ‘to think you should be alive, and here.’

‘Where are we?’ asked Carrell.

‘Where are we?’ repeated the man in a tone of contempt, as if the question was connected with some unpleasant associations in his mind.

‘Where are we? Why, at the maddest place in all England.’

The young man smiled faintly, and asked—

‘Where is that?’

‘On the Essex shore,’ replied the bargeman. ‘Did you never hear of Claytersville? Clayter’s Folly maybe you’ve heard it called.’

Carrell shook his head, and the bargeman continued his remarks, as he went to and fro arranging articles about the cabin with the handiness of a seafaring man.

‘It’s a waterin’-place, that’s what it is. And, oh lor, what a waterin’-place! I’ve coasted about in some sort of craft now, man and boy, these fifty years. I’ve seen a good many waterin’-places. Abraham Stedman is my name; perhaps you’ve heard it before; skipper and owner of the barge Polly. She bears the name of this outlandish hole in gold letters on her stern, as you may see. When I steers her into dock up



in London I says to my missis, "Drop a bit of tarpaulin' there aft, old woman, and cover her starn.' But the chaps hangin' about the dock always see her, and cry out "Here's a game! A wessel in from Claytersville! What's the news? How's Clayter? Any wisitors yet? Is bisnis brisk at the Rile Hotel?" And ceterer.'

Carrell was still too weak to pay attention at first to the speaker, or to catch more than a faint impression from his words. But the skipper and owner of the barge Polly was not one of those talkers who require encouragement. The fact that the young man gave few tokens of hearing him did not embarrass him in the least, or prevent his continuing his denunciation of Clayter and his watering-place, emphasising his remarks every now and then by setting down a stool, or a bucket, or a kettle, or some cooking utensil with a violence which seemed to bring relief to his feelings. His remarks were somewhat rambling, but there was always one point in them which recalled him to the main subject, and gave fresh vigour to his tirade. This was the name of the town, which he pronounced with a long pause upon the first syllable, expressive of concentrated scorn for the unfortunate watering-place.

'Clay—tersville,' he continued, 'Foolsville,

Bedlamville would suit it better. But what's the good of my talkin'? Captain Clayter is gone cracked about it, and build, build, build is all he thinks on. I take the liberty of tellin' him what I think. I speak out, and I say, "Captain, excuse me, you're in the hands of rogues." But he says he must carry out his views. "And besides," he says, "Abraham, you know how to steer a heavy-laden barge in a gale of wind, but hang me if you know anythin' about spekylation." Poor gentleman, a kinder never was; but it's the fault of them as lend him money on his land and carcasses, and push him on to build Rile Hotels where there's nobody wants entertainment, and Marine Terraces where there's no tenants, and Rile Sea-water Baths where nobody ever wants to swim.'

'How far are we from the spot where you saved me from drowning?' interrupted Carrell, who was beginning to gather from the barge-man's remarks some notion of the place to which his fate had brought him.

The man stopped in his harangue against Claytersville, and said, as he ascended the cabin stairs again—

'Twenty miles good. I came down in just one tide, and hardly a breath of wind.'

Carrell felt relieved by this information. He began to think that he might lie there quietly while his money lasted.

His first thought, on returning to consciousness, had been to feel if the few pounds that he guarded in the pocket of his canvas shirt were safe. This small stock of cash had been slowly saved, and hoarded for his time of need.

## CHAPTER V.

## CLAYTER'S FOLLY.

EDWARD CARRELL lay all that day in the little cabin, where the bargeman's wife waited on him with the care of a mother for a child. On the next morning he rose, dressed himself in some better clothing, which Stedman had bought for him, and went ashore.

The place looked as deserted as the bargeman had described it ; but Stedman's cottage was at a little distance from Captain Clayter's unfortunate town. It was a neat white house of one story high, with windows on each side of the door, which was surmounted by a wooden porch overgrown with creeping plants in flower. In front of the cottage was a garden, which sloped down to the little creek or inlet where the barge lay moored. As Carrell stepped from the barge into this garden and walked up the gravel path, a blackbird in a wicker-work cage hanging beside the porch piped out two mellow notes. It seemed to him a sound of welcome, and an omen of peace and rest.

Everything within the house was clean and bright. Carrell had a bedroom assigned to him from which he could see some of the unfinished buildings, with their staring, blank window-places, on the rising ground which had been chosen for the site of Claytersville. On the other side the country was flat. There was not a sign of life visible, except one man in a vast brick-field beyond the creek, and a boy leading a horse in a dreary round, the animal being harnessed to a machine for mixing clay.

It was a place in which a man might remain concealed without much danger of detection. Carrell knew well enough the habits of men of the class of his pursuers. Unless they had received information of his whereabouts, they would look for him along high-roads; in ale-houses; in market-gardens where there is a demand for chance labour; in poor lodging-houses, and places of that kind. It would not be likely to occur to them that he had retired to Captain Clayter's ghostly watering-place far down the Essex coast. After a while, if they found no trace of him, their search would inevitably flag. Some other case would occupy their attention; he would be forgotten for awhile; the barge would be going to London, and Stedman would give him a passage. What place so

favourable as London for concealing a fugitive? Once there, it would not be difficult to find employment. He was a man of good education; he had had the training of a gentleman. The resources open to him were far greater than those within the reach of an ordinary deserter. If he could get a chance of rising into a better sphere, he was confident of his own power to turn it to account. He had no character, it was true; no friends, no hope, but in himself. He must begin the world anew; but how many men had had to do that, and yet had prospered?

Carrell thought over these things until there seemed to be already a gulf between him and his past life. The follies of his youth had been bitterly atoned for. The tyranny of those who had driven him, first to insubordination, then to desertion, to escape the degradation of the soldier's punishment, was in his eyes sufficient justification for his flight. Anyway, he would go through with it now; and how often, since his last escape, had he felt support in the bitter thought, that to prefer death to the ignominy of the lash was to be already free.

As he recovered strength again he found means of employing himself in return for the hospitality of the bargeman and his wife. He

was ingenious and ready, had a quick turn for mechanics, and a way of doing things peculiar to himself. He understood something of gardening, and between pruning, nailing, and digging, contrived to occupy himself for several days.

Carrell soon discovered that the barge did not go up to London very often. Both the Stedman family and the barge were in the service of the enthusiastic proprietor of Claytersville, and, like everything else in connection with that unlucky project, they were managed in an unthrifty way. Clayter had begun by hiring everybody and everything in the neighbourhood that seemed likely or unlikely to be wanted. He was the owner of a considerable estate, of which Claytersville—or 'the Essex Margate,' as he had called it, in those advertisements in which he had invited the world in vain to flock thither—formed part. When he had sunk his private fortune in building the hotel and baths, and the jetty, and the rows of terraces, on which the damp sea air had planted a green mildew before they found tenants, he mortgaged his estate. Then he took to mortgaging his houses, giving bills of sale upon his plant, his horses, his stock of bricks, the timber and material which he had accumulated in that

forlorn and spectral town which was known to the country folks as 'Clayter's Folly.'

Still he built on in an irregular way, sometimes dropping the work for awhile, at others beginning with new energy. At these latter times it was whispered that the 'money market was easy,' or that the captain had found a new capitalist who had faith in the concern. People then began to think that it might, perhaps, come right after all ; that Clayter was a long-headed fellow, who saw further than other folks, and that it was only a question of time and patience. The captain had himself a manner of talking of his schemes which infected those who came near him. He dilated on the soil and climate of the place, proved by returns which there was nobody, at least in that part, learned enough to dispute, that there was not a spot in the Isle of Wight half so favourable for invalids. He could quote old books to show how vines were once cultivated in that country, and wine actually made there in ancient times which was not despised by royal guests at the famous Abbey of Barking. As for trade, nothing was wanted but a longer jetty to allow vessels of greater draught to load and unload, and a railway down to the place, to make it the great port for cattle coming from Holland and Germany to be fat-



tened for the London market in the salt marshes of South Essex.

It was no wonder that these things at times turned the brain of the country folks. The captain's own faith in the place was undoubted, and faith in the preacher goes a long way in making converts. But it was a simple mistake of the captain's neighbours to suppose that capitalists were induced to share in his dreams. The fact is, that there was but one capitalist who would still advance money to the captain on his property, and he was a very shrewd and unromantic capitalist indeed. He knew well enough that invalids were not likely to prefer Clayter's Folly to Ventnor or Ryde; did not in the slightest degree anticipate the resuscitation of the South Essex wine trade; would not believe in any railway, or new jetty, or great cattle trade till he saw it; and had not the least hope of guests at the Royal Hotel, or of tenants for Marine Villas, except the few pilots or half-pay lieutenants who inhabited some of them because they were cheap, and who lived in only half of the rooms because their furniture was scanty. This capitalist's name in London was indeed sufficient guarantee for these facts. When people found that Frere, of Wellclose Square, had taken up Captain Clayter's scheme, no one

who knew anything about him was deceived into thinking any the better of it. On the contrary, the world regarded it as the last stage in the captain's progress, and the certain forerunner of his ruin. The fact was, that Frere knew very well that a place in which a fortune had been sunk might not be a successful speculation, but might still furnish security for loans up to a certain point; and this point he had very accurately determined by frequent visits and by personal inspection of the property.

The captain's project had indeed nearly come to a standstill when Frere took it up. Clayter had borrowed of relatives and friends, and even of dependants, until all resources were exhausted. Even Stedman, the bargeman, had lent him the little savings of his lifetime, for all who came within the captain's influence, and had anything to lend, became his creditors. Stedman had been employed by the captain's father when the captain himself was a boy. He had been a careful man, had bought his barge and boat, and was, besides, the owner of a neat smack or 'hatchboat,' in which he went to sea in the 'herring season,' not to fish, but to buy the herrings of the fishing-boats, and take them to market. He made a profit out of these things, and had thriven. To do the cap-

tain justice, he had behaved fairly by the bargeman, who, when he had lent his money, had had faith in the captain's dreams, and would have taken his note of hand as willingly as his bond; but Stedman's little debt was secured on a safe mortgage. The bargeman would say to his wife sometimes—

‘Tisn't the bit of money that makes me abuse the Captain's Folly; the lawyers made that safe enough; but it's the captain's self I think of. One day this beastly hole will blow up, and then what's left for him but the workus or the debtor's gaol?’

Only a short time before the last return of the barge there had been a great gala at Claytersville. The captain had chartered a steam-vessel from Margate, and had brought over numerous friends and acquaintances, that they might see for themselves the great superiority of his property over that vulgar and over-rated watering-place. The Royal Claytersville Gardens—everything was royal about Claytersville—were opened that day with the usual coloured lamps and flags and a brass band. The Gardens were a strip of field along the side of the beach, on a hungry, sandy soil, in which the flowers were covered with a fine white dust, and the grass was always brown. There was

a marquee on this grass, in which the banquet took place. Twigs of about the height of a man, newly planted at regular intervals along the water-side, and protected by wire cages around each, were the only trees in the grounds. They were not very ornamental, but they furnished the captain with a neat conclusion to his speech on the occasion, in which he hoped that all present 'might live to see them cast a pleasant shade over groups of fair ladies and children seeking health and pleasure in that favoured spot.' The gala was regarded as a success; but it was doubtful whether the new watering-place derived any advantage from it. Like most periods of excitement, it seemed to be followed by a corresponding time of depression. When the lamps were out, the marquee and the chairs removed, the brass band dispersed, and the visitors gone home, the loneliness of the place became still more depressing. Even the rumour that Frere, the great capitalist, was coming down there again to put up at the Royal Hotel, and set the Royal Sea-water Baths and the Royal Bazaar going again, was insufficient to revive the drooping spirit of the few regular inhabitants of the place.

Carrell did not venture to walk into Claytersville except once or twice at night, when

there was no danger of being observed ; except this, he rarely strayed beyond Stedman's gate or the side of the creek. Even the brick-field was to him a place of dread. To seek for work in brick-fields was notoriously one of the resources of deserters ; and if this field had been in full working it would not have been safe for him to remain so near it. But happily for him, it was well known that Claytersville was passing through one of its periodical phases of inactivity. The freemasonry that exists among tramps seeking for work, generally sufficed to warn a man in time that his pains would be wasted if he wandered in that direction ; but if it did not, the police would know well enough that a deserter would not be likely to find employment there.

Abraham Stedman was, perhaps, the only busy man in that scene of bankruptcy and ruin, for even the one man and the boy in the brick-field had been discharged, and had left the neighbourhood, and the horse had stopped his dismal round, and been turned out to feed on the withered grass of the Royal Claytersville Gardens. At such times of general suspension of the Claytersville speculation Stedman invariably went to work with his son to do such repairs as had become necessary to the barge and the hatchboat.

There were few things in which Carrell could not lend a hand. Moreover, he had been accustomed to manage a sailing-boat when a youth, and was ready both at repairing and rigging small vessels ; so that Stedman soon found his assistance useful, and worth paying him wages.

‘My boats are a safe bank,’ the old bargeman used to say. ‘Put a week’s labour into them and it’ll pay good interest.’

Stedman and his son worked at repairing the keel of the barge, which they had propped until she stood high and dry except at the highest tide. They burnt the pitch off her sides with hand-grates of live coal ; re-caulked and pitched her again, and let in new timber in her deck where the old was worn. Their hammers rang sometimes from morning till night ; but Carrell had a quieter task. He worked a new mainsail and foresail for the hatchboat, mended her rigging, and painted her in ultramarine blue, with white stripes, until she looked as neat and pretty as a gentleman’s yacht.

• On the day after the bargeman had rescued him he had asked Carrell his name, and Carrell had answered him as he answered the giant overlooker at the excavation—Ishmael. He felt a strange sort of pleasure in adopting a name significant to him of his early struggles ; and

the bargeman was too simple a man to observe anything unusual in it. It was too common for him to know men only by their Christian names to feel any curiosity about his guest's surname; and as a Biblical Christian name seemed to him perfectly natural, he called Carrell by the name of Ishmael from that time. Curiosity, indeed, was not one of Stedman's faults; and if his wife had not asked him, while Carrell lay in the cabin, how Ishmael came to be capsized, it is probable that he would never have enquired into any part of Carrell's past history. The question once started, however, he was led to ponder upon it, as he sat smoking in his little room one evening, after the labour of the day was concluded. Carrell and Mrs. Stedman were present. The former had been reading to them some news from the Chelmsford paper, when the old man knocked the ashes from his pipe, set it down in the chimney-corner, and said—

‘Mightn’t you find out, Ishmael, where your boat came ashore?’

‘What boat?’ enquired Carrell, whose mind was occupied with the hatchboat on which he had been working all that day.

‘The boat that capsized you that night,’ replied the bargeman.

Carrell started. He had dreaded some ques-

tions being put to him about the past ; but was not prepared for it in this form.

‘No boat capsized with me,’ he replied.

‘How came you overboard, then?’ asked the bargeman.

Carrell hesitated a little, and the bargeman’s wife looked up from a pair of stockings which she was knitting, and observed his embarrassment. He soon regained his self-possession, and answered calmly—

‘It was a stifling hot night. I had been at work in the sun all day, and I thought to swim to the opposite shore. I found it too much for me, and called to your barge for help. The rest you know better than I do. You saved my life, and I am grateful for all your kindness to me.’

There was a pause, during which Carrell heard the loud tick-ticking of the eight-day clock in the room with a painful distinctness. Curiosity about his past life once awakened, he knew not where it might end. He felt a relief when Stedman filled his pipe again, lighted it, and said—

‘It was a mercy I heard you ; if it hadn’t been for Stumpy setting up his barking, you’d never ha’ found your way to this Rile waterin’-place, and I do believe Clayter’s Folly would



not ha' had a single visitor. You see, if we want people to come here, we have to bring 'em willy-nilly. That's the captain's way. He gets a steamboat and he goes into Margate like a press-gang, and capters people, and persuades 'em under various pretences to come across and eat, and drink, and dance to the tune of a brass band and a couple of fiddlers. And ceterer.'

The bargeman once launched upon his favourite topic, Carrell knew very well that there was no danger, for that evening at least, of the conversation taking another turn. Stedman diverged into the subject of his last journey to London, and the cargo he had aboard that night; a quantity of tiles, and drain-pipes, and cement, to be employed in building a market-place up the town—the mention of which market-place furnished another variation in his invective against the Captain's Folly. Then he told the story of other voyages he had made, and how his time had been wasted, and the captain never a bit the better for all the cargoes he had ever brought there, and so forth.

Carrell was glad to steal up to bed that night. The enquiries of the bargeman had rendered him uneasy; he began to be impatient for the completion of the repairs of the barge, and for some news of Stedman's departure. He had little

indeed to fear from malignity, either in Stedman or his wife ; they were an honest pair, and he was in favour with both ; but Mrs. Stedman was not free from the proverbial curiosity of her sex. She pondered long upon Carrell's embarrassment when questioned about it that night, the reluctance he had shown to give anything more than short answers to her husband's enquiries, the curious fact that he was found drowning in midstream on a summer's night, with no boat at hand, and no token of any accident having occurred. Carrell, indeed, had admitted that he had not been capsized ; but then his explanation that he had been swimming after the fatigue of work in the hot sun seemed more mysterious still, for who would think of swimming in shirt and trousers ? and as for the idea of reaching the opposite shore, it was madness. Then his miserable clothing had struck her as more strange. He had money in his possession ; but he was absolutely without boots, and bare-headed. A man who desired to cross a river by swimming might wish to carry his clothing with him ; but surely he would not leave his boots behind. She had observed, besides, that his feet were cut and bruised, like those of a man who has walked far barefooted. They had, indeed, only healed slowly.

All this puzzled the good dame. Like Mrs. Caudle of glorious memory, Mrs. Stedman generally selected bed-time for beginning a discussion of this kind, and on this particular night she opened fire in the following fashion :—

‘How could Ishmael swim across the river in Sea Reach?’

‘No how,’ replied the bargeman, vainly hoping to cut short the conversation by laconic answers. ‘Didn’t he find he couldn’t?’

‘Yes,’ replied the dame; ‘but why did he try?’

‘Because he wanted to get across, I suppose.’

‘But it’s miles wide there.’

‘Maybe he didn’t know that.’

‘He could have seen it was a long way.’

‘Very likely,’ replied the bargeman. ‘I suppose he didn’t think it as much as it is. It was night, missis, and there’s a spirit in the lad.’

‘Just tell me this,’ said the wife, determined to persevere. ‘What did he swim in shirt and trousers for?’

‘To wash ’em, I should say,’ answered Abraham; ‘canvas and old ducks take no hurt from the water, and don’t hinder a man much.’

Mrs. Stedman, nothing daunted, returned to the attack, and said, ‘Yes, but where were his boots, and his jacket, and cap?’

She asked him this in the tone of one who feels that he has pinned an adversary, but her husband's answer was ready. He was not in the least of a suspicious turn, and moreover was very tired and sleepy.

'Lord love ye, missis,' he replied, 'it's as plain as a marling-spike. Why, he made 'em into a bundle, to be sure, and lost 'em when his head went under. Would you have had him leave 'em behind?'

Mrs. Stedman knew that it would be useless to continue her questionings; but she was not convinced. She had felt, with a woman's instinct, that her guest, in spite of the miserable appearance which he had presented when he had come among them, belonged to a better class of life than they did. He was 'a scholar,' that she knew; but his language had that superiority to the talk of common men which people in a humble station are quick to detect. Having settled this, she came at once to the conclusion that he was a young gentleman who had run away from his friends. Indeed, she had made up her mind upon that point before her conversation with her husband, the object of which was only to fortify her own conclusions.

As to the mystery of the river, it was, to her, no mystery at all. He was not swimming, but

simply drowning himself ; that was clear. And when did young fellows of his strength and abilities drown themselves for anything but love ? This theory, it is true, presented new difficulties ; but Mrs. Stedman did not see them. No woman is too old to have entirely lost her liking for a romance of this kind. It would have taken a great deal of reasoning to persuade her that some woman was not at the bottom of Ishmael's mystery.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE LADY ON THE BEACH.

THIS was not the only circumstance which caused Carrell anxiety. On the second night after his conversation with Stedman and his wife, he met with an adventure which, though slight in itself, was sufficient to disturb him. A habit of hiding from pursuit had rendered him suspicious, and even the most trifling things were to him suggestive of danger.

He had sauntered out for a walk after supper, and had taken the way up the hill through the main street of the town. It was near ten o'clock, and he knew by experience that there was no one abroad there at that hour. It was safer even than the beach, where a man, attired as he was like a sailor, might awaken the suspicions of some look-out man of the coast-guard service.

No city of the dead could have been more silent or deserted. The air was heavy and still, a thin haze had risen and was hovering over the town, hiding the stars. It was so dark that a passenger who had not taken the middle of the

road, would have had a difficulty in finding his way. Nor was there any assistance from lights in the town. Gas-works were indeed a part of Captain Clayter's great scheme, but they had yet to be erected; and the few oil-lamps which stood at the corners of his unfinished terraces were not lighted on summer nights. Here and there, in some of the houses which happened to be occupied, a dim light, like the pale reflection of some rush candle in a sick room, appeared in one window of an upper chamber, as if some solitary inmate, knowing not what else to do, had resolved to follow the example of his neighbours and go to bed.

Carrell passed the entrance to the Royal Gardens, the fences of which had been broken down by some of the boys of the town—for there were boys, even in Claytersville, who preyed upon the neglected property with the destructive instinct of their nature, and took advantage of the feeble watch which was maintained over the place in times of depression, to make their way into the Royal grounds and enjoy their attractions gratis. The unfinished market-place, of which only a stuccoed entrance had been built, was equally silent. Even the Royal Hotel was closed, and showed no sign of life, except a dimly-lighted window of a tap-

room, which was visible across the stable-yard at the side of the house. In front the windows were all closed ; and the door under the portico, the panels of which were glazed, was darkened with shutters, as if business, if it had any, was over for the night.

He strayed some distance beyond the town, and returned again by the same way. The great hotel stood out towards the roadway at the angle of a street ; its windows on one side looked down the road in the direction from which he was approaching, and he observed with surprise that, instead of being dark as before, they were brilliantly lighted. Coming nearer, he saw that the shutters were removed from the front of the hotel, and that there were lights there also. An open carriage was standing at the door, with post-horses and streaming lamps ; and a group of men were around it, talking to the post-boy. The roadway in front of the house was in a blaze of light, but the occupants of the hotel, and the post-boy and ostlers, were too busy to remark him as he passed them. Nevertheless, he determined to stroll no more through the streets at night, but to take his daily walk at early morning along the beach.

The days were still hot, and the nights heavy



and dull, but in the early morning the air was cool and pleasant. On the second morning after his night walk, Carrell walked down the shore to the edge of the water, and picked his way over shingle and sand, and among the salt pools left by the tide. A solitary bathing-machine, hauled up high, with its canvas half rotted away, and some spokes missing in its rickety wheels, betokened the desolation of the place. In the distance a few vessels were drifting down with the tide. The sun had risen, and the waters sparkled in the cool morning light. Far away across the beach, upon a huge stone half covered with the tide, a solitary white bird stood dozing. Except these no signs of life were visible.

Carrell walked on until he had left the town some miles behind, though it was still early. He returned by the same way along the shore, but this time he kept close under the sand-cliffs, where the walking was better; for he had quickened his pace, and was anxious to get back.

The cliffs wound abruptly, and were full of little recesses, where tufts of grass and plants with purple blossoms found a footing, and flourished nearly to the highest points. Elsewhere, the sand-martins had riddled the steep

sides with holes, to which they clung twittering and fluttering.

Turning a little jutting point that ran down and terminated in the sand of the sea, he came to a ledge of grass and wild convolvuluses, which formed a sort of natural seat for viewing the surrounding scene; for at the foot were some masses of conglomerate rock, which seemed so well designed for foot-stools for those who chose to rest themselves awhile, that it was hard to believe that they had not been placed there by men's hands. They were fragments of cliff, which had been rolled by the wintry tempests up the heaps of blown sand, accumulated there, and stopped at last by the ledge of rock, for in ordinary times the rising tide did not reach so high.

It was upon this natural ledge, and just above one of these resting-places for the feet, that Carrell could see, as he approached, some small object. As he drew nearer, and stepping from stone to stone, ascended the sandy ridge, he perceived that it was a book. It was evident that it had been left by some person who had been resting there; but he could see no one along the shore, and he had not met anyone in all his journey.

He climbed on to the fragment of rock,

and took the book in his hand. It was elegantly bound in blue morocco, and had no stain upon it, or trace of the night dews. It could not, therefore, have been left there long. He opened it, and found that the book was in Italian. It was the famous narrative by Silvio Pellico of his imprisonment in the fortress of Spielberg. Carrell had used the same work as an Italian text-book when at school, and he knew enough of that language to read it easily.

He examined it carefully, but the only trace of its owner that he could find was the inscription on the fly-leaf:—

‘I. F. From her friend H. L. T., Brussels. On her fifteenth birthday.’

The slight uncertainty about the last pronoun was too feminine to leave any doubt that the book was the gift of a lady, not to speak of the evidence of the handwriting. Carrell placed the book carefully in his pocket, and walked on faster. He had little doubt that he should overtake the owner gathering shells or specimens of sea-weed round some point in the sand-cliffs. He had thought of the bathing-machine; but that rickety vehicle was clearly not in a condition for a lady's use. The lady who had come abroad at that early hour was probably merely taking a walk in the cool

morning. But he met no one except a fisherman in blue Guernsey shirt and high jackboots, carrying a shrimp-net along the shore. Carrell asked him no questions; but pulled his straw hat low, and passed him at a slight distance.

The little book was too full of tender reminiscences not to be examined again by him that night. It carried him back to happier days, when the difficulties of construing and the mysteries of irregular verbs were the only troubles of his boyish life. It brought before his eyes a room with desks and oaken panels, cut with rude initials by many a penknife; a long room, in which there was a buzz of voice and a dreaded figure sitting at a high desk. It led him away to a country village afar off, and a low-built white house with many windows and a flower garden and orchard, and a meadow beyond—once his home, though now long passed into strangers' hands, and lost to him for ever.

Searching in the little volume that night for any further traces of the owner, which might enable him to restore it without making himself known, Carrell came upon some passages marked in pencil. They related to the sufferings of the author of the book—his long imprisonment in Austrian dungeons, the cruelty

of his persecutors, his longing to be free. The marks, with some pencil notes here and there, were touching tokens of a woman's tenderness, but in his eyes they were something more. The miseries he had suffered had met with no compassion from the world. It was pleasing to him to note the marked passages, and to gather from them some fanciful notions of the owner of the volume. It wanted no great stretch of fancy to see in them affinities with his own position; and to take to himself as expressions of sympathy with his own miseries those pencil touches from an unknown hand.

The next morning he walked along the beach at dawn as before, but he met no one. On the following day he walked there again two hours later. On his way back he came round a sandy promontory, and caught sight of the figure of a lady seated, as nearly as he could judge, beside the very spot where he had found the book.

This was, beyond doubt, the owner of the little volume. Carrell hesitated. He had the book, neatly folded in paper, in his breast-pocket. Should he advance and offer it to her, or should he go back and get Stedman to take

it to the hotel? For there could not be a doubt that the young lady was one of the visitors whose arrival had caused so much commotion in that establishment. As every one knows, a man is not always in the secret of his own motives. Carrell looked back, and thought of the distance he must walk if he returned. His direct road lay past the very spot where the lady sat; to go back would have compelled him to take a circuitous way, and one, moreover, which would render it impossible for him entirely to avoid the town. He determined to go on.

The strange lady wore a straw hat, and was attired in a morning wrapper and jacket, both of pure white. Her face was turned seaward, where there were some sailing vessels which attracted her attention. As Carrell drew nearer she caught the sound of his footsteps on the shingle, started, looked round, and then turned her gaze seaward again; but the fact that he was not making his way round the ledge of rock, but walking straight onward to the spot where she sat, soon attracted her attention again, and she looked up at him once more with a slight gesture of alarm. He took the book from his pocket, and opening the paper wrapper, he saw her eye fall upon it, and the

expression of alarm in her face give way to a smile.

‘Oh, thank you!’ she exclaimed, before he had time to speak. ‘Where did you find it?’

‘On the rock near where you are sitting, madam.’

‘I felt sure that I had left it there,’ replied the lady, ‘but I could find no trace of it. I was grieving about my loss all yesterday. It was a gift from a friend who is dead.’

He perceived that she had dark hair, that her face was pale, and that her features were rather expressive than beautiful. He bowed, and was about to walk away, when the young lady said—

‘Stay a moment, please.’

Carrell saw her dip her hand in the pocket of her dress, as if seeking for a purse. He coloured slightly; and the lady observed his embarrassment, and drew her hand from her pocket.

‘I wished to thank you once more before you go,’ she said, withdrawing from the position with a woman’s tact; ‘I am really very grateful to you, sir. Good-morning.’

He returned her salutation, and pursued his walk. The sound of her voice seemed still in his ears as he reached a distant point in the

sand-cliff which would soon hide him from her sight.

He lingered for a moment and stole a backward glance, very cautiously, lest he should be observed.

The precaution was needless. The lady's face was turned again to a point out at sea, where the noble, full-rigged ship was unfurling her topsails to the light morning breeze ; and the sea gulls were skimming and dipping on the wrinkled surface of the water.

What was this strange lady to him, or he to her, that the sound of her voice should haunt him ? He was a poor hunted fugitive, she a lady, whose haughty impulse had been to reward him for a trifling service with a gift of money. It was most probable that he would never see her again, or if he did, that some other humiliating circumstance would once more remind him of her position and his own miserable lot.

What was the strange lady to him, or he to her, that the sound of her voice should haunt him ?

This question rang in his ears as he was engaged that day in finishing his labour on the hatchboat, like a mocking voice, ever ready at his elbow to rouse him from his dreams.



## CHAPTER VII.

## CHICKENS UNHATCHED.

CARRELL was not long in discovering that the name of the strange lady was Isabel Frere. On the day that he had met her on the beach, Stedman received a message from Clayter to attend him, and take orders for loading the barge. The bargeman returned home, and reported that the visitors at the hotel were Mr. Frere and his daughter, besides Captain Clayter and Mrs. Clayter, with a numerous retinue. The fact was, that when Frere determined to give himself a holiday, and take his daughter to the sea-side, he invariably went down to Claytersville. He gladdened the captain's heart at such times by being loud in his praises of that strangely-neglected watering-place. To his daughter he gave the reason that he could not take a holiday except in the way of business. He might have added that it was pleasant to know that every day he spent by the sea-side was charged to the account of his client, and that the bills at the Royal Hotel,

and even the cost of the post-chaise in which the party drove over from Chelmsford—for there was no nearer point by rail to Claytersville in those days—were also paid by the unfortunate captain. It was a remarkable fact that Clayter's circumstances were never so desperate but that he could find money for display of this kind. His simple confidence in his project was mingled with just that dash of charlatanism which makes up the character of the true schemer. 'A little magnificence,' he was wont to say, 'goes a great way;' and, indeed, the news of a post-chaise, with postillion in blue, driving through that quiet country, laden with important personages, representing capital and credit in the city of London, soon spread, and was not without its advantages. It helped to inspire a belief that something was going to be done at last with the 'Essex Margate.' On this occasion the captain's satisfaction had been somewhat marred by the fact that he arrived in the town after dark and took the hotel by surprise, for Frere had insisted on going over a day earlier than was intended. But there was some compensation in seeing the announcement a few days later in the county paper, that 'John Hawkins Frere, Esquire, the well-known capitalist, accompanied by his daughter, Miss

Isabel Frere, and Captain and Mrs. Clayter, were among the company staying at the Royal Hotel, Claytersville.'

To Isabel Frere these visits were a pure delight. She knew nothing of the captain's misfortune, and listened to Mrs. Clayter's sanguine talk about the prospects of the town with that sort of vague acquiescence which results from want of interest in the subject. Whether Claytersville was a success or not, seemed to her mind a question of no importance whatever. Was there not the sea there? the pleasant open country? the sandy beach? the fresh air and sunshine, so delightful after long months of pent-up solitude in her father's house in London?

Long before the rest of the company were astir in the hotel, she took her morning walks along the shore where Carrell had met her, facing the early morning breeze until her pale cheeks almost glowed with a colour, and her deep blue eyes grew brighter. At breakfast-time her father would lean across the table and whisper to his client—

'Belle improves.'

On one of these occasions the captain had replied, as was his wont, by a dissertation upon the healthy air and generally sanitary qualities

of the neighbourhood; but the lawyer's mind was running on another subject.

'The colonel might find a worse match,' he remarked, still in a low tone, as they retired to the window after breakfast.

The captain was a little man, with long fair moustache, entirely out of proportion with the rest of his physical characteristics. It was said by some that this military appendage constituted his sole claim to the title of captain; but the fact was, that it was given to him because he had been a captain of militia many years before. He stroked his moustache, and asked with the drawl which was habitual to him when not talking about watering-places—

'The colonel? What colonel?'

'Hush,' said Frere, pointing with his thumb towards his daughter, who was reading a letter at the opposite window; and then, bringing his mouth closer to the captain's ear, he said—

'Colonel Carew.'

'Ah, yes,' remarked the captain, in the tone of a man who feels bound to make a remark on a subject of little interest to him; 'I remember now. Is it all settled?'

Mrs. Clayter, who had been deeply interested in the intricacies of crochet-work up to this

point, perceived that her husband and the lawyer were talking in whispers, and took this as a sign that they had private business to discuss. She touched Isabel on the arm. 'Let us go down the town, dear,' she said. Isabel, who little suspected how closely the whisperings of her father and his client concerned her, folded up her letter, and the two ladies left the room.

Frere made no reply to the captain's last question. When the ladies had gone he walked to and fro with the air of a man whose mind is occupied with some subject that deeply interests him.

He was a tall, bony man, with a slight stoop; scrupulously neat in his attire, which was a trifle obsolete in fashion, as becomes a man of business. His white cravat and brooch were perfect, his face always clean shaven, his nails neatly trimmed; his boots, under which his trousers were tightly strapped down, were wrinkled and highly-polished, like those affected by young men who were called 'bucks' some forty years since. His hair, which had once been sandy, had taken that indescribable colourless character peculiar to this sort of hair when turning grey, but he was not in the slightest degree bald. At a guess he might have been

taken for not more than fifty, for his face was ruddy and healthy, and not unpleasing in its expression; except when, now and then, he stooped and looked hard at some one to whom he was speaking. Then a pair of small grey eyes twinkling under his shaggy eyebrows seemed to change the expression of his features to something wolfish.

The captain sat astride upon a chair, and leaning with folded arms on its back, watched the lawyer's movements.

'You think this only concerns me,' said the lawyer at last, pausing and stooping till his face was on a level with that of the captain; 'but you are mistaken. This Carew is worth a fortune to us.'

The captain's face brightened, and his drawl disappeared in the eagerness with which he responded. 'Is he though? Show me how. I never thought of that.'

'I know what I am doing,' said Frere, as he continued his walk to and fro in the same hurried way as before. 'I am accustomed, you know, to look ahead, and to have half a dozen reasons where some people are content with one. The fact is, we must get out of this Claytersville scrape. It's pleasant, agreeable, healthy, and all that; but it's a dead failure,

and there's the end of it. Don't waste any words on me. Do you know how much I've got locked up in this wilderness?'

'Wilderness?' repeated the captain. 'A place that only wants a few thousands more to make it one of the most agreeable, as it is already one of the most salubrious, spots in the United Kingdom?'

'Stuff,' interposed the lawyer. 'Keep all that for a prospectus. It's salubrious enough; but the fact is, I'm at the end of my tether. I ask you again, do you know how much I've locked up in this salubrious desert?'

'Under ten thousand,' replied the captain. 'What's that to my investments?'

'Nearer eleven,' returned the money-lender, with a short snap which sounded uncommonly like the bark of a dog. 'You forget the bonds for interest. Now, if I came to sell you up, where should I be?'

The captain wriggled uncomfortably in his chair, and said—

'Paid off over and over again.'

'Not a bit. There's a hundred acres of brick earth, for example; who'd give anything for them as soon as building stops—as stop it will if something is not done?'

The captain passed his hand across his fore-

head. This abuse of his great project had to him a sort of profanity in it.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed almost plaintively, ‘I wish I could make you see it as I do.’

‘Nonsense,’ persisted his companion. ‘Be a man of business. Look things in the face. The game is up. The place is getting a by-word. People call it Pompeii. Look at the grass in the streets, and the brambles in your market-place, and then tell me if this is a case for a few thousands more.’

‘What are we to do?’ asked the captain helplessly.

‘That’s the point,’ returned Frere. ‘There’s only one way out. There must be a Claytersville Company. The company buys the property of you, pays off the mortgages, sets the building going again, puts the brick-fields in full play, and then—who knows?—people may come to forget the name of Clayter’s Folly, and marine residences at Claytersville may yet be the rage.’

‘It’s a miserable ending,’ remarked the captain.

‘It’s the only one possible,’ retorted his companion, ‘except bankruptcy and beggary. You’ll assign to the company for money and shares;



the company will buy out my clients, and the thing's done.'

When Frere spoke of his 'clients' in this way, he meant himself. The fact was that he generally lent his own money, but found it convenient, for many reasons, to maintain the fiction that certain dummies who signed the deeds on his side were the real capitalists in the matter.

'There will be something for me, of course, as promoter of the company,' continued Frere, who was evidently in high spirits at the prospect. 'A company for a project like this is not to be got up by anybody. What we want is names. One or two good directors will bring a dozen, and with a strong list, shares for anything will float. You'll sit at the board.'

'Of course. And who else?' said the captain, whose spirits began to revive at this prospect of his still retaining an influence over the destinies of Claytersville.

'That's it,' replied the lawyer. 'Who else? Where's pen and ink?'

The pair retired to a table in a recess beside one of the windows, and unlocking a desk, sat down to write.

Frere took pen in hand, and began to write on a half sheet of paper the names and addresses following :—The Right Honourable Lord Carew,

of Framlingham Park, Suffolk. Colonel Charles Carew, of Borley Barracks, near Rochford, Essex. Captain Clayter, of Claytersville, and the Beeches, Rayleigh. John Hawkins Frere, Esquire, of London.

‘There!’ said the lawyer, throwing down his pen and pushing the paper under the captain’s eyes. ‘That’s a start, and a start is everything.’

The captain looked at and repeated the names aloud. The project began to look fairer in his eyes. After all, he thought, he would continue to be the practical man, the real director of the scheme; and any way, it held out a promise that the works would go on. But perhaps the lawyer was too sanguine.

‘How do you know Lord Carew will come in?’ asked the captain.

‘The colonel is certain to bring him.’

‘But has the colonel himself consented?’

‘Leave that to me,’ replied the lawyer. ‘Carew must help me. The colonel hasn’t a sixpence; head over ears in debt. Sheriffs’ officers in at his quarters the other day, though nobody knew it except me. Carew would have had to fly the country years ago if I hadn’t propped him up in hopes of better days.’

‘I see,’ said the captain, ‘a client of yours.’

‘Exactly,’ replied the lawyer.

‘Your future son-in-law?’

‘Perhaps,’ returned the lawyer, shrugging his shoulders. ‘We have talked of it. Belle and I go direct to Borley on a visit when we leave here. They met when she was a girl. Let me see—seven years ago—just before she went to the school in Brussels.’

‘I know Carew,’ remarked the captain; ‘a yachting man and a racing man. Saw him at Chelmsford races last year—a fine fellow. A good ten years older than your daughter, though.’

‘Not too much, if the girl likes him.’

‘But he has the reputation of a spendthrift.’

‘He can’t spend Belle’s money,’ replied the lawyer. ‘Besides, he’s settling down. Spend-thrifts make good husbands when their money’s gone; and the colonel has good prospects.’

‘I see the whole thing,’ said the captain, rising from his seat, and surveying the lawyer with a sort of wonderment. ‘By Jove, you play boldly! This means a prospective connection with the peerage.’

‘Why not?’ snapped the lawyer. ‘I take my chance. If the old lord marries again, he may have children, and away goes Belle’s hope of being Lady Carew. Or the colonel may die. It’s a security, I know, that nobody would take

in the money market. But if I choose to accept it on behalf of Belle in the matrimonial market, isn't that fair? It may turn out well; it can't turn out very bad, for my daughter's portion will be safe. What say you? Give me your notion, captain.'

Frere never asked for advice with any intention of taking it, unless it happened to coincide with his own views. On this occasion he was prompted simply by exuberance of spirits in the contemplation of his plan, and by that fondness for dwelling upon the subject of his schemes which is common to all schemers. The lawyer was, in fact, as great a projector as his client, with the difference that his projects generally turned out well.

'It's splendid!' replied the captain. 'The board of directors of the Claytersville Company will be an aristocratic family party.'

'Only one thing could mar it,' observed the lawyer, as he went over and stood with his back to the fireplace, as if it was winter and a good fire was in the stove. 'Only one thing.'

'What is that?' enquired the captain, who began to feel a personal interest in the affair.

'Belle's temper,' replied the lawyer. 'Ten thousand peerages would not make her marry the colonel if she took it in her head to refuse.'

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed the captain, ‘I thought her a lamb.’

‘She’s good enough,’ replied the father. ‘But most women have a will; and she has something more. A lamb! She’s as gentle as a dove. But try to drive her one way when she thinks she ought to go another. Tell her she *must* marry a nobleman, and it’s ten to one she would take it in her head to marry a crossing-sweeper.’

‘Why not command her, then, to marry a crossing-sweeper, and forbid her to marry a nobleman under any pretence?’ enquired the captain, laughing loudly at his own joke.

Frere took no heed of the captain’s sally. ‘I know Belle,’ he continued. ‘A whisper to her that she was going to Borley for the colonel to fall in love with her would set her bristling like a porcupine. Didn’t she run away from the school in Belgium?’

‘How was that?’ enquired the captain.

‘I thought I had told you. It is a sad story. She got news that her mother was ill—thought she was dying—and wanted to go home to her. Mademoiselle Blaquiére refused permission; but she did not know Belle’s spirit. The girl dropped out of a window that night, with only a couple of napoleons in her pocket; made her

way to Ostend; crossed to England; and startled us in the old house when we thought her far away. How could I blame the child? She had guessed her mother's situation better than we had. But for that flight she would never have seen her alive in this world.'

The captain whistled. 'A spirit of that sort,' he said, 'is apt to show itself in the grown woman. Let the colonel look to it if he should ever think of locking up his wife.'

The lawyer was not in the habit of wasting time upon considerations of this kind. Such remarks appeared to him to be unbusiness-like. They had no practical bearing on the matter in hand, and were the mark of a frivolous mind.

He rang the bell, and the servants removed the breakfast service; while Clayter, standing in one of the bow windows of the room, saw his wife and Isabel Frere promenading in a stately manner down the street. The lawyer had a heap of letters and papers from London, some of which concerned the great Claytersville speculation.

'Come, captain,' he said, 'to business.'

Clayter took his seat at the table, and thenceforth their conversation acquired a more prosaic tinge.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ON THE SEA.

WHILE Frere and his client were thus maturing their schemes for disposing both of the destinies of Claytersville and the hand of Isabel Frere, various accidents threw that young lady more and more into Carrell's path. He met her again along the beach, and received from her each time that haughty and gracious recognition which great personages sometimes bestow upon poor dependants. On another day, Mrs. Clayter, who never came to the town without visiting Stedman's cottage, took her young friend with her to see the bargeman's house and garden. Carrell, who was still at work upon the little craft, heard the younger lady say to her companion—

‘It is my hero of the book.’

The two ladies were at the door of the cottage, but the voice was loud enough to reach him distinctly. Even this fact served to remind him of how poor and humble he appeared in her eyes. If he had been in her own station of

life, she would undoubtedly have been cautious and reserved; or, if she had had occasion to mention the trifling service he had rendered her, would have dropped her voice to a whisper, and blushed at the thought of being heard. As it was, the two ladies actually stopped and stared at him. Mrs. Clayter—from a distance, it is true—even applied her double gold eyeglass to her eyes to take a more careful survey of the stranger; after which the friends continued their walk, as if his presence was of no more importance than that of the hatchboat itself.

So Carrell's dream of the lady whose heart had bled for the poor captive in the Austrian dungeon was disturbed.

He asked himself why this lady should treat him any otherwise than with that cold condescension which had cut him to the quick? He had indulged his fancy in clothing her with ideal qualities. What if his vision bore no real resemblance to the lady herself? It was still pleasing to think of her as gentle, and tender, and compassionate. This was his day-dream. If she was the very reverse of all these things, what then?

He was not so foolish as to imagine himself in love with this strange lady – so far removed



from him, so little likely ever to regard him as on a level with herself. Indeed, he scarcely knew her, save in that fanciful portrait which he had delighted to imagine. But in secret, her pride aroused his spirit. 'If I might but begin the world again—if this stain could be wiped out,' he thought, 'I might meet her yet where at least I should not be an object for her scorn.'

He desired to avoid her now, and took his morning walk along the beach in the opposite direction; but there is a fate in these things, let the wise say what they will. Her father still delayed; for the great step in contemplation for the resuscitation of the Claytersville project necessitated a large amount of preparation. The mortgages on the property had to be examined and scheduled; the value of the different portions to be estimated; the terms of leases and other tenures of the property to be considered; various interests to be reconciled; prospectuses to be drawn, and other things accomplished before the scheme would be in a condition to submit to the colonel and his noble uncle. So the table of Captain Clayter's sitting-room at the hotel was covered with plans, parchments, and drafts of documents, over which the lawyer and his client laboured with

a diligence worthy of the great interests at stake.

There was not much in all this to attract Isabel Frere, who read in her own room in the heat of the day, and in the morning and evening walked on the beach as before, watching the tide as it advanced or receded, and the ships far away at sea. Of such rambles she was never tired; but it happened that she frequently passed the cottage by the creek, and visited Mrs. Stedman, who was pleased with the young lady, and who liked to cut her nosegays from her garden to decorate her chamber.

On one of these occasions, Stedman conducted her aboard the barge, and showed her its cabin and the various contrivances for raising sails, dropping and lifting the anchor, and other things. Carrell saw her from the hatchboat, where he still found something to employ his time. Then she stepped ashore, and condescended to take notice of the hatchboat and its neat and trim appearance. Carrell heard Stedman's remark—

‘She looks ship-shape now, miss. Thanks to Ishmael.’

Carrell winced. He would rather that she had not known him by a name associated with

his past misfortunes ; but he looked up, and received from the lady so gracious a smile, that the resentment which he had felt towards her vanished in a moment. She even came down with Stedman to the edge of the creek to say good-morning, and asked him whether his work was finished yet.

Carrell replied that there was nothing now to do but to let some paint get dry. Stedman proposed to take his visitor aboard, and she thanked him, and accepted the offer. There was a plank from the shore to the boat. It was broad enough to pass without danger, but Carrell rose and met her cautiously half-way, and offered her his hand.

‘ A workman’s hand is not fit to touch a lady’s glove, madam,’ said Carrell ; ‘ but you might trip.’ The lady assured him that she was very much obliged, and took his hand frankly as he led her up the bending plank. She examined everything upon the deck and in the little cabin with a childlike curiosity and delight which was altogether unlike the manner of the haughty lady on the beach. The hatchboat floated, for the tide was high, and it rocked a little with the movement of those aboard ; but the young lady held to a rope to steady her footsteps, and looked quite at home in the little vessel.

‘Does it sail well?’ she asked.

‘I believe there is not a tighter little boat on the water,’ replied Carrell.

The young lady looked seaward with that wistful gaze which he had remarked the first time that he had met her, and said—

‘How delightful to leave this hot and dusty world ashore, and to sail far away, out to that horizon line, with nothing to do but to steer, and hear the waters rippling under the keel.’

‘You have been at sea, madam?’ asked Carrell.

‘Often,’ she answered, ‘but not lately. While my poor mamma lived I used to spend my school holidays with her at Torquay, and there we often sailed in a cutter. I remember we went to Dieppe once.’

‘That was a long voyage.’

‘Yes; but not too long. I love the sea better than the land, and am never happier than when I am afloat.’

Was this the proud lady who had seemed to survey him from Stedman’s garden as if he had been some strange curiosity of nature? Her voice was soft; her eyes tender and deep; her face thoughtful, with somewhat of a melancholy cast; but of that proud disdain which he had attributed to her he could read no trace. Had

he been over-sensitive? had the fact of her evident intention to offer him money the first time that he had met her prejudiced him? What folly! for had she not checked herself with exquisite delicacy? and, after all, was she to blame for thinking that a poor man would be willing to accept her bounty?

She sat on a seat in the hatchway to which Stedman had conducted her, and she showed no willingness to leave, but chatted with the old man about the sea, and the fishing season, and his journeys in the barge, while Carrell busied himself in knotting some cordage on the deck. He was glad to listen to her unobserved; but now and then she turned to him again to ask him some question with the air of a well-bred lady who felt bound to recognise his presence from time to time. By-and-by she rose to go; Stedman assisted her to go ashore. Before she went she turned to Carrell and said—

‘Good day, Ishmael.’

It was the style of a lady to an inferior; but it was not displeasing in Carrell’s ears. Even the employment of his Christian name in that patronising way did not offend him now. Was it not his lowly position which had procured him these smiles and recognitions? To one who had no thought of anything but the pleasure

of dreaming about her as a fair divinity far removed, to whom he might offer secret homage, there seemed now even an advantage in their relative stations.

If he had been a free man, all this might have been like the beginning of an insane passion. To Carrell's mind it was but the indulgence of a harmless dream. An outcast and a wanderer; a man who had offended against the laws, and who must live, if at all, in concealment, and in daily fear of a terrible and degrading punishment—he had no right to aspire to the love of the poorest girl who had led an honest life. It was not likely, then, that he would think of love in connection with Isabel Frere.

That night he had a practical proof of his own wisdom in this matter. While he was sitting with his good friends the bargeman and his wife, Mrs. Stedman spoke of their visitor. She had heard some gossip from the servants at the hotel about Mr. Frere and his daughter. Though Isabel Frere herself knew nothing of the matrimonial designs which were preparing for her, a vague rumour had somehow got abroad that the young lady who spent so much of her days by the sea-shore was in love, and engaged to be married to a very great gentleman, who

was the heir to a title and estates. Mrs. Stedman repeated this item of gossip, with the further information that the marriage was to take place very shortly, and that the father, who was very rich, was to bestow upon her a large fortune. Carrell received this veracious piece of news with perfect calmness. It was quite natural that his ideal woman should marry; that her betrothed should be great and powerful; that she should love him and be beloved in turn. Her voice would still be pleasing in his ears, her tenderness and goodness healing to his spirit after the horrors of the past, her presence in that deserted place still a glory and a shining light.

The next day Stedman received orders from Clayter to prepare the hatchboat for a sailing trip. Isabel had spoken of the vessel, its neat and trim appearance, and its sailing qualities, for which the bargeman's boat-builder, who had the strange name of Ishmael, had vouched; and Clayter, glad to find her amusement more attractive than witnessing their daily porings over plans and deeds, promised her that she should sail under Stedman's care for a morning's excursion on the sea. There was no more experienced boatman than Stedman. Clayter knew that; Frere also had heard of his steady cha-

racter and seamanlike qualities. There was little probability of danger in a short pleasure trip with Stedman, and Frere consented to his daughter's going in company with Mrs. Clayter.

It so happened, however, that the sailing-boat could not be launched that day. There was something still to be done to her rudder, and there was besides not a breath of wind. But there was the skiff in which Stedman proposed to take the ladies for a row. What could be more delightful? In half an hour Carrell constructed a slight awning of white canvas upon upright stanchions, and cushions were fitted and the boat rendered fit to receive them.

Carrell had the great felicity of being invited to help in rowing, and Stedman and he pulled down the creek at high water, and rowed steadily, skirting the coast at about half a mile from the shore.

'We have a precious freight to-day,' said the old man in a sudden burst of gallantry, 'and must not venture out in a boat without a deck.'

Isabel assured him that they felt no fear in his hands, and would like to go out to the sands which were visible above the water in the distance, if he thought it well; but then she added considerably—



‘It may distress you to row so far?’

‘Bless you, miss,’ said the bargeman; ‘old sailors don’t tire very soon in pulling a skiff; but we must take care of you.’

‘But Ishmael is not an old sailor,’ said Mrs. Clayter.

‘No,’ returned the old man, ‘nor a young sailor either; but he understands a skiff or a hatchboat as well as most people. See now how he feathers his oars; he pulls as even stroke as a man-o’-war’s man.’

Carrell felt confused at this outburst in his praise. The ladies laughed. The sun sparkled on the waters. The low ground-swell lifted the boat and dropped it again with a delightful indolent motion. The rowers held their sculls awhile, and let the boat move only with the tide.

‘How pretty the town looks from this distance,’ said Isabel, looking from the side of their awning. ‘What a pity one should ever have to go ashore.’

Carrell gazed at her in a sort of rapture. She appeared to him like some fair creature who came not from the earth, but from those bright caverns under the sea which figure in the old legends of the northern people. The white attire in which she delighted seemed to have a

glory of its own, like the snowy plumage of some swift sea-bird. That yearning for the sea and for its delightful liberty and freshness might, by a slight stretch of his fancy, have indicated a vague remembrance of another existence in which her spirit had hovered over the deep like the sea-gulls that in the distance were dropping down upon the water to float awhile, and then take wing again. Even her voice seemed now to have some affinity with the sea, and its soft murmurings on the shore and in the hollows of the cliff. So passed this summer's day.

Such was the influence of this bright vision which haunted his daily path, that Carrell seemed to have drifted into a new life, in which all was freedom, sunshine, and joy. It was to him a sort of intoxication. He was conscious of a strange pleasure, which was without hope, or even thought of hope, and yet blissful and complete; content to feed upon itself, to look upon its object as a picture which could touch the heart with its purity and beauty, but could never bring regret. In a little while she would be gone. What then? Could he not dream of her still? And would she be further removed from him in all except that power to dream of her than she then was? More than once he had touched her hand; the first time when he had

assisted her to walk along the plank, the second time when they had beached the boat for the ladies to land upon the sands. On the latter occasion the bow of the boat, which was high and dry, swayed to and fro as it balanced on its keel, and she was compelled to lean upon his shoulder ; but such incidents, which would have been so precious in a lover's eyes, added little to his delight. She inspired him with a sort of awe, and he approached her always with a respectful bearing, which she rewarded by many a kindly recognition.

There was to be a sailing-match that week, the yachts engaged in which were to start from some point in the Lower Hope, and to sail round a flagboat at the entrance to one of the numerous channels at the mouth of the Thames. Stedman received orders to get the sailing-boat ready for the ladies to witness the race. The little vessel would have taken half a dozen persons conveniently, but Frere and the Captain were too deeply engaged in their business to join the party. Owing to her father's absorption in his profession, Isabel, though leading a secluded life, had always enjoyed a considerable amount of liberty, which had helped to confirm that independence which her father designated under the

name of 'temper.' She had no fear of the sea, and it did not enter the mind of her father to put restraint upon her in such matters. Moreover, Stedman's seamanship was a guarantee for safety, and Mrs. Clayter was to accompany her.

Only the night before there had seemed little hope of anything but a dead calm. Isabel, who had looked forward with eagerness to the excursion, was delighted, when she rose in the morning, to find a gentle rustle in the leaves of a tree beneath the window. Far away the sea seemed without a ripple; but she knew that there was just enough of air to sail, and moderate the heat. The provisions were placed aboard before breakfast, and the party started early; for the tide was ebbing in the creek where the little vessel lay moored.

She was bright and gay in her new colours, and with her streaming pennant. The ladies sat on cushioned seats in the cockpit of the boat. Carrell steered, and the old man unfurled her snowy sails to catch the breeze, which was so light that they were compelled to move her with oars down the sandy channel, which was the mouth of a little river. Once on the sea, the air filled her sails; but very slowly, and she seemed to float with the tide

rather than to sail. Isabel was in high spirits. Mrs. Clayter, who was less accustomed to the sea, took courage from her example. A happier company never sailed from shore. Frere and his companion watched the vessel from a side window of the hotel. She moved so slowly that the lawyer remarked that they would never reach their destination, which was a good twelve miles away.

Coming to the window again, some time afterwards, to see what progress the boat had made, they found her already only a dot in the far distance.

‘The wind must be a little fresher out at sea,’ remarked Clayter, ‘or else we have been busied and let the time slip by.’

In shore there was certainly no sign of a fresher breeze. The flag that had been run up in the Royal Claytersville Gardens in honour of the visit of the proprietor hung round the flag-staff, and the sea was still without a ripple.

The lawyer and his companion resumed their business, and remained closeted all day. As post time drew near there were letters to be despatched, and they sat writing at the same table busily to catch the post. Dinner had been ordered for seven; and it was thought

probable that the sailing party would be able to return before that time.

It was nearly six o'clock, when the pair were startled by a noise like the sound of artillery at a great distance.

'What is that?' asked Frere, looking up.

The noise was heard again; a treble roll of sound still very distant.

'It is thunder!' exclaimed the lawyer.  
'And no sign of them yet.'

He hastened to the back window, and there perceived that a great bank of thunder-cloud already filled one-half the heavens, extending down to the horizon line.

'Perhaps they have got into shelter,' he said.  
'Let us go and see.'

The pair took their hats and hastened down to Stedman's cottage; but there were no tidings there. Great spots of rain were falling, and though there was as yet scarcely any wind, the dust and bits of straw on the ground were stirred now and then in little eddies. They hastened to the cliff and looked across the sea, but there was no sign of a sail near shore, and in the distance a slaty mist blotted out everything. A vivid flash of lightning broke out of this mist as they stood there, followed by a louder peal than any they had heard before.

‘Stedman is a good seaman,’ said the captain. ‘He will have stood out to sea and run down channel.’

But Frere was too agitated to make answer. All that could be said in favour of their safety he knew well enough. He wanted no comfort or counsel, but his practical mind did not forsake him. He knew that nothing could be done but to wait, and he returned to the hotel, and from the windows watched the sea and sky all night.

The rain fell in torrents, driven by the wind. The heavens opened and shut again with scarcely any intermission; the sea beat high upon the sandy shore and lashed the cliff.

It continued till daylight, when it cleared a little, and the wind dropped. They could see far out to sea now, but no sign of the little craft was anywhere visible.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE RACE.

FOR more than an hour after the hatchboat sailed out of the sandy channel, she ran gently before the light breeze, which touched the water now and then with just the faintest wrinkles, and fanned the faces of that happy party. Her sails were all set, but there was still so little wind that she sailed almost upon even keel, and not a sprinkle of spray had been felt aboard. As they gained the offing it freshened just a trifle, and the little craft stood away gallantly towards her destination. The unfinished town upon the cliff shrank to the dimensions of a toy village, the cliff-line sank till it seemed almost level with the water, and gradually all objects on the shore became blurred and indistinct, down to where the coast line, receding to the eastward, melted into sea and sky.

Mrs. Clayter knitted, but Isabel preferred to enjoy the scene. After awhile the latter came aft, and sat on the cushions of the cockpit, where Carrell stood ; and where she was



enabled to look astern and watch the gradual dwindling of the land.

Stedman gave directions as captain of the little craft ; but in truth there was little need of seamanship in such a fair-weather cruise, and in a boat of so light a draught. They were now near the flagboat, which was gaily decorated with colours and streamers ; but it wanted yet some hours to the time when the yachts were expected, and Stedman determined to tack about and run down channel a little. Luncheon occupied a little time, and talk about the sands, the lightboats, and their dismal life in winter, consumed the rest.

Mrs. Clayter and Stedman kept a sharp lookout for the yachts ; but Isabel Frere felt little interest in the match, which was to her only a trifling incident in their sea excursion. Suddenly the two foremost of the racing vessels became visible, and the hatchboat lay to in order to observe the match. The wind was still light, but their wide-spread canvas carried them swiftly on. Two more soon followed, while the two foremost yachts kept ahead and almost abreast, with their snowy topsails rising to the sky. One after the other the sailing-yachts now hove in sight, and Mrs. Clayter, sharing in the excitement of the race, noted the burgees at their topmast

heads as they became visible, and referred to a little card for their names and commanders. The old man held the great glass for her while she drew it out to its focus, and, surveying the vessels, determined their names and owners one after the other.

‘The Vixen is ahead,’ she said. ‘She is Mr. Courtney’s yacht. That one nearly abreast of her is Lord Rochford’s Isabel.’

Carrell caught the name, and his eyes turned involuntarily to Miss Frere, who was still seated in the cockpit taking only an occasional side-glance at the race in the distance.

She smiled, and looking up slily at him, said—

‘A namesake of mine. I ought to wish her success.’

Carrell dropped his gaze. There was an opportunity for one of those artificial compliments in which most men indulge on such occasions ; but he answered only by directing her attention to the leading yacht, as she rounded the flagboat, and began to tack away up channel again. She had made a somewhat wide sheer in going round the mark ; leaving room for the Isabel to go in between her and the boat. The Vixen made an effort, by luffing, to prevent her antagonist taking advantage of her bad steering ; but the manœuvre failed.

A sudden flash of light broke from the flag-boat, with a puff of white smoke, which was followed by the dull report of the gun. Another and another succeeded as the different vessels came round and followed in the wake of the two first.

‘The Isabel will beat ’em,’ said the old man.

‘Ah, that is gallantry and politeness,’ said Miss Frere, who heard the remark, and turned now towards the hatchway. ‘You flatter us one day by calling us “a precious freight,” and another, by predicting my namesake’s victory. But the race, you know, is not always to the swift.’

‘We shall see, miss,’ said Stedman; ‘but I lay my hatchboat to a cockle-shell she holds her own right up Sea Reach again.’

‘Oh, I hope she will,’ said Mrs. Clayter, ‘she is a lovely vessel. Look at her now.’ All eyes aboard the hatchboat turned to her. She lay down just slightly, and seemed a mountain of white; for at the angle at which she sailed it was difficult to distinguish any part of her hull.

‘Why must she beat all those other noble vessels?’ asked Isabel.

‘I know her,’ replied Stedman. ‘She had a fair wind coming down, such as it is; and the

others hugged her close. Put her about, and she'll leave 'em all in her wake.'

It proved as the old man had said. She was already ahead, and the distance between her and her nearest competitor was evidently increasing.

'Bravo!' exclaimed Mrs. Clayter. 'Isabel is the heroine of the day. Three cheers for Isabel.'

'Thank you for this enthusiasm for my namesake,' said Miss Frere. 'But Ishmael here is a traitor. He does not cheer.'

She looked up at the steersman, and found his eyes fixed upon her, as if he was lost in thought, and unconscious of her words. She coloured slightly. Something in his bearing had struck her as being different to that of the humble folks by whom he was surrounded. The respect which he had shown her was always marked by a certain dignity which her womanly instincts had been quick to detect. She had bantered him to encourage him to feel at ease; but her kindly efforts had produced no change in him. Then she remembered the incident of the book, and made up her mind that she had wounded him in some way, and that Ishmael had not forgiven her yet. This distressed her, for she thought to herself that she

would be grieved to think that even Ishmael should have been offended by her manner. Even Ishmael! It was fortunate for Carrell that he could not read those words in her heart: they were sincere; for it is the woman's instinct to fascinate, even when unconscious of it; and to blind herself to her own work by a subtle hypocrisy like this.

While Isabel was speculating in this way she was aroused again by the voice of the captain's wife.

'A splendid vessel, but rather late in the race.'

The yacht she indicated was bearing down with all sails set, but there was an evident absence of that excitement about her which marks the movements of those which have still a chance of success.

'She has lost heart,' said Stedman. 'A lubberly lot, or her captain would sail her to the last.'

'She is not in the race at all,' said Carrell, observing her. 'She rounds the flagboat, but she's one of the yachts that have followed the others to see the sailing.'

'She is last, anyway,' said Stedman. 'Where's her burgee? my eyesight isn't what it used to be.'

Mrs. Clayter, card in hand, rested the glass on Stedman's shoulder ; but no burgee was visible. As she came round and passed the flag-boat, the ensign at her peak was displayed.

'Ishmael is right,' exclaimed Mrs. Clayter. 'I know her now ; she is the Snowflake.'

'Who's her owner, ma'am ?' asked Stedman. 'Colonel Carew.'

If Isabel had been observing their steersman at that moment, she would have seen still greater cause for speculation. As Mrs. Clayter uttered the name, the tiller dropped for a moment from his hand, and his features assumed something of that wild expression which had characterised them when he found himself entrapped in the excavation in the marsh. He fixed his eyes on the vessel as she tacked, looking as if about to alter her course, and bear down upon them ; but it was but for a moment. She tacked again, and stood away up channel in the wake of the other vessels.

Carrell seized the tiller again firmly : no one of the company had observed him, for Stedman had been busy in attending on Mrs. Clayter, and the latter, as soon as she had determined the name of the vessel, called Isabel to her side to tell her how she and her husband had met the colonel at the races the year before, and to pour

into her ears some praises of the colonel's manners and appearance. She knew the secret of the purpose of Frere's visit to Borley, and was discreet and diplomatic; but what lady can resist the temptation of having a hand, however slight, in the business of matchmaking? She artfully insinuated various points in the colonel's favour, told how the ladies at the race had praised him for his handsome figure and his pleasant society, and avowed her belief that if he had chosen he might have married one of the richest heiresses in the county.

'But you know, dear,' she said, 'there is a fatality about these things. The colonel did not like her, I suppose, and what is fortune without love?' and so forth.

Then she took another tack. 'There is not a man in the county,' she continued, 'with better prospects. Some say he has been wild, but then he was only wild in an innocent way. He has been fond of racing, and particularly fond of yachting. But then,' added the artful creature, 'that is no crime—is it, dear?'

Isabel replied, 'Not at all; at least, I hope not,' and Mrs. Clayter continued—

'They tell me he has spent a moderate fortune in these things, but is now becoming quite a wise man. He has sold his stud, and keeps

only the Snowflake for his amusement now and then in the summer, pays his debts, and all that, and will assuredly be a great man one day. He is now a Colonel and commandant at the Cavalry barracks at Borley. He has powerful influence for advancement, too, for he is the only nephew of Lord Carew, who, you know, dear, has large property in Ireland and in Suffolk. Though they say that he does not help his nephew much, he can't help his succeeding to the title and estates, as he is next heir, and in all probability will be Lord Carew before many years; for the old lord has no children, and is a widower, and already over sixty; so that you know, dear, unless his lordship makes himself ridiculous by a second marriage, the colonel must succeed.'

Isabel tried to take interest in all this talk, which Mrs. Clayter was so kind as to keep up for her amusement. The captain's wife spoke in a mysterious whisper, which only reached the ears of Stedman, who sat near them, in disjointed and unintelligible portions; and Carrell heard no word.

'But I forgot,' continued Mrs. Clayter, with a hypocritical air of innocence, 'you are going to Borley on a visit direct from Claytersville,



and will see the Colonel for yourself. I congratulate you. You will find him delightful.'

So she continued her simple babble, and would have continued it much longer but for an exclamation from Carrell, which aroused their attention.

'Look yonder, Stedman,' he said. 'Surely there's thunder in that bank of cloud?' Mrs. Clayter started, and left her place to look in the direction Carrell had indicated; but Isabel sat still beside the old man, who at first took a quiet survey of the sky.

The party had been so much occupied with the race and the pleasures of the day, that even Stedman had taken no heed of the weather, and had forgotten his seamanlike habits in his novel occupation of a squire of dames. For two hours, too, their gaze had been steadily directed to the east, where the sky was clear and open. The aspect of the heavens to the westward, to which Carrell now directed Stedman's attention, brought the latter in a few moments to his feet. The old man mounted one or two of the ratlines of the shrouds, and looked around him anxiously. All eyes were now turned to the west. The effect of this change in the direction of their observation from the clear sky which they had been watching so long to the darkened horizon be-

hind them, was curious. The weather seemed to have changed with a suddenness almost supernatural.

‘Shall we get in before the storm comes, captain?’ asked Mrs. Clayter nervously.

‘I’m no prophet, ma’am,’ replied the old man, ‘but we’ll try. Anyway, we’ll run on under all canvas while there’s no more wind than this. Put her about, Ishmael.’

Stedman let go the foresail in order to bear away for home.

Isabel spoke little. She looked astern and could watch the curious aspect of this sudden change. The clear heavens over head, and the darkness, which was now spreading over the sea far down the channel where no coast-line was visible, had a wild and sinister effect, which was heightened by the strange fact that the great mass of cloud rapidly moving up the sky was driven by some current of air which did not reach the level of the sea, where all was quiet still. The white gulls that flew across the heavens in this direction looked whiter, and were visible at far greater distances, than before. And now it became evident that there were two distinct wind-currents in the sky, moving at different rates of velocity; for above the great bank of cloud that was coming steadily onward, huge

black masses moved upward faster still, with faded edges, massed together cloud on cloud. The sun set as if by sudden magic in the solid line, and there descended on the sea a sort of premature twilight, which was ghastly and ominous. Still there was no lightning or thunder, and upon the water scarcely a breath of wind. Then what little wind there was dropped away for awhile, and the sea was glassy and dark with the reflection of the sky. The vessel made little way, but the calm was treacherous.

‘Had we not better prepare for a squall, sir?’ asked Carrell.

‘I’ll make ready,’ replied Stedman; ‘but we must run down the East Swin, if we can, before we take a reef in.’

## CHAPTER X.

## A LONG NIGHT.

THE first peal of thunder came from the far horizon. There was at first no lightning with it. Then there came another and another. Then great spots of rain fell, dimpling the smooth surface of the sea.

‘You had best go into the cabin, ladies,’ said Stedman; ‘there’ll be dirty weather before we get into shelter.’

But Isabel prayed to be allowed to stay. ‘I’ve no fear,’ she said, ‘and this tarpaulin protects us from the rain. I could not breathe below. Indeed I could not.’

Mrs. Clayter clung to her companion tremblingly, and whispered to her, ‘Oh, pray for the lightning to cease.’

Stedman had seen specimens of ladies’ courage before, and resolved in his own mind that argument would be thrown away, since a very few more peals of thunder would probably suffice to change Isabel’s determination.

Evening was approaching, and it was already

growing dusk ; for the great clouds of the upper and lower strata were massed together, and now filled the sky from horizon to horizon. The aspect of the sea was gloomy and terrible. Half an hour before, two ships were visible at about a mile distance, scudding under bare topsails, and preparing for the storm ; but now the slaty clouds seemed to descend in a mist upon the waste of waters, and nothing was visible anywhere around. Still the little vessel ran before the wind.

‘ A red revolving light, sir, ahead,’ said Carrell to Stedman.

The old man turned and looked towards it ; pulled out an antique watch, and held it up to his eyes. He could just trace the figures on the dial.

‘ It is just as I thought,’ he said : ‘ It revolves in half a minute. The red light of the Gunfleet. But it’s a long way off yet.’

Isabel heard this with the feeling of comfort which is inspired by the presence of superior knowledge in time of danger ; but she still prayed for the safety of the little boat.

Just then a gust of wind, so sudden that there seemed but a second between it and a quiet sea, struck the hatchboat on her weather-quarter, and swept the deck. The cockpit and the cabin

were flooded, and the vessel lay down until her lee bulwarks were under the waves.

‘Luff!’ cried the old man.

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ replied Carrell, who obeyed the old man’s orders with the deference of a seaman to an officer. The hatchboat was soon brought up to the wind.

‘Well done. Now keep her head up to the wind, while I make all snug.’

The bargeman seized the topsail halyard, but at this moment he thought of the danger in which the ladies were placed; for the boat lay over still under the pressure of her canvas. ‘If any harm came to my captain’s wife,’ he thought, ‘how should I ever face him again?’

He hesitated a moment, then he leaned over the cockpit, and said in an authoritative voice—

‘Come, you must not be here; indeed you must not. The captain is my master, and has been a good friend to me ever since I nursed him as a boy. You’re in danger. There’s no dry place but the sail-room forward. Come below.’

But Mrs. Clayter still clung to Isabel, half dead with fright, for the gusts succeeded each other rapidly, and the lightning broke out of the cloudy mist, filling the space round the vessel with its fierce blue glare. Carrell grasped the

tiller with his right hand, and with the other assisted her to rise ; but she was speechless and helpless. Meanwhile he whispered to Isabel not to fear ; that there was little danger ; that their boat was a cork on the water, and would live out ten times worse weather.

Isabel placed her hand upon his arm, and said, 'Thank you, sir ; I will be patient. But do not send me below. Oh, pray do not.'

Stedman had heard Carrell's words, and was vexed at what seemed a contradiction.

'Little danger !' he said. 'It wants the sea-legs of an old sailor to hold on here in such a squall as we shall have. Come, ma'am, quick !'

Mrs. Clayter clung to Isabel still ; but the old man's patience was exhausted. To keep the captain's wife out of harm's way was, in his eyes, the first duty to be performed. He sprang down into the cockpit, and tearing her from her companion, held her up with his left arm over his shoulder, while he climbed on the little deck again to make his way forward.

'I'm a little rough, ma'am,' he whispered to her ; 'but I can't see you lie there and roll away into the lee wash—perhaps overboard, who knows ?'

A sudden flash dazzled his eyes, and he stag-

gered under his burden ; but Stedman was too well used to walk a deck in bad weather to lose his footing easily. He paused a moment, and held on to the shrouds. The lightning flashed again ; the figure of the old man bearing his charge was visible to Carrell for a moment, and all was dark again.

Then came another gust, succeeded by a crash which shook the little boat from stem to stern, and a shriek, followed by a second and a fainter shriek, arose to heaven, which struck the cowering woman who still remained aft with a terror she had never felt till then.

Carrell dropped the helm and groped his way forward, holding on to the ropes. What had happened ? Some portion of the rigging had gone under the pressure of the wind ; but what portion ? and where were Stedman and his charge ?

He called aloud, ' Stedman ! Stedman ! Abraham ! Pray speak ! ' Isabel heard him, and covered her face with her hands in vague terror, lest some sight too horrible to bear should meet her gaze when the next flash came. But she heard no answer to Carrell's cry.

Carrell's first suspicion was, that the topmast had been carried away by the pressure of the sail, and had struck them senseless to the



ground ; but he groped about the deck and could not find them.

Once more the lightning filled the air with its blue quivering blaze, followed by a peal of thunder which seemed half to subside and then break out again and roll through the sky with still louder roar. The flash was but for a few seconds, but the awful truth was revealed. Neither Stedman nor the captain's wife were on the deck ; and a glance aloft had shown him that his suspicion was correct. The topmast had gone close off by the cap ; and, falling overboard, had been broken away from backstays and topsail sheet, by the force of the waves. It had vanished in the sea.

There was yet a hope. He groped his way to the little sail-room, crying aloud, 'Stedman ! Stedman !' But to his horror, the hatch was close down.

Carrell fell upon his knees and wept. The man who had saved him from drowning he had been powerless to save. The good friend who had sheltered and protected him in the lowest depth of his misery, was gone from him for ever. Swept overboard in mid-channel, many miles from shore ; a woman frantically clinging to him ; with no help at hand on such a night, what hope could there be of the poor barge-

man? His happy home would be desolate ; and if those who still survived should escape, it would only be to bear the dismal tidings to his wife.

In the darkness and confusion he had seen nothing pass to leeward, and he had heard no cry except that woman's shriek, that seemed still ringing in his ears. The occurrence, too, was so sudden that his senses still refused to believe that Stedman was really missing. He groped his way aft again, without speaking to Isabel, and stared into the darkness astern, praying for another flash to light the sea ; but the interval was long ; and when the lightning came, it seemed to quiver round the very spot on which he stood, and dazzled him so that he could see nothing. When there came a fainter flash, no object was visible across the water except the long crests of waves that rolled away astern.

Stedman, like many other seafaring men, was no swimmer. Carrell had heard him say this when talking of his adventure in Sea Reach. The nearest land was certainly far distant ; and the wind, moreover, was blowing down channel, and would carry any floating object out to sea. Even if he had been fortunate enough to grasp a portion of the topmast, so as to keep afloat,

what chance could he have in such a spot? Before morning he must have drifted many miles to leeward, where it would be far more unlikely that he would find assistance. But the fact that Stedman had uttered no cry satisfied Carrell that he had been struck by some portion of the falling mast or tackle, and rendered insensible at the moment of being swept overboard. In such a state, how could he hope that the poor bargeman would have even the drowning man's instinct of grasping at a floating object? and his companion, in the agony of death, would assuredly bear him down, till both were lost.

Carrell stood for a moment paralysed with horror, as these considerations passed rapidly through his mind. He had forgotten even the presence of Isabel, until she rose from her place, and staggering forward, clasped him frantically round the arms, and cried aloud—

‘Save them ; pray save them ! Oh, Ishmael, what can I do ? Tell me, what can I do ?’

Her clothing was dripping with the rain and the spray, her head was bare, and as she clung to him he could feel her sob. In despair he held her head between his hands, and strove to speak some word of comfort ; but none came to his lips.

‘I cannot save them,’ he said. ‘Heaven help them. They are beyond our aid.’

She muttered feebly ‘Amen;’ and relaxing her hold, sank down again and wept, and rocked herself to and fro in the agony of her despair.

Her white figure, crouching down in the lee-water, which was now deep in the little cockpit, was indistinctly visible, even amid the darkness. In the presence of the calamity that had befallen them, he had forgotten the dangers of the moment; but the sight of her misery and grief recalled him to himself. The rudder of the vessel, now she lay to the wind, swung by itself, and but for the press of her sails she would have met the seas gallantly. Carrell mounted the deck, and in a few minutes, feeling his way to the halyards, he lowered her jib, and reefed her foresail. In a moment the brave little vessel felt relief, and lay up closer to the wind. She shipped no more seas now; and though the gale and the rain were unabated, the water ceased to flood the cockpit.

The sea had swept the deck clean of everything loose; but Carrell took off his boots and went aft again, to bale out. Isabel was still bent low in the same attitude of despair, when he touched her on the shoulder, and said calmly—

‘Our grief is idle; let us do our best for the sake of those ashore, who are praying for your return.’

The sound of his voice aroused her. She looked up, and said faintly—

‘Show me what I can do, and I will obey you.’ Carrell begged her to hold on for a moment, while he ran some ridge ropes along the bulwarks; but she implored him not to leave her till he had found her some task.

‘Give me something to do,’ she said, ‘or I shall go mad with my own thoughts.’

Carrell placed a boot in her hand, and begged her to scoop up the water in the cockpit and cast it to windward. Meanwhile, he fixed stanchions in their places in the bulwarks, and running the life lines along, rendered the after part of the vessel safer against a sudden lurch. After that he returned and assisted her in baling, until the little cockpit was comparatively dry.

Then he reversed a cushion, and made her a drier seat, and arranged the tarpaulin so as to protect her better against the rain and spray.

The storm still raged as Carrell took his station sorrowfully at the tiller again, and glanced at the pale face of Isabel Frere, as the lightning revealed her figure to him more

plainly from time to time. His anxiety now was for her only. Though he had some knowledge of sailing vessels, he had no experience in managing such a boat in dangerous weather on the sea at night. He knew that the channel at this part was a labyrinth of shoals and sandbanks. The light draught of the hatchboat might make it possible to cross many without danger; but he knew there must be some which it would be destruction to drive upon. Happily, however, the boat was now lying to, and though making some leeway, was hardly moving two knots in an hour. By keeping her head about three points off the wind, he diminished this movement as much as possible; and so hoped to weather out the storm till daylight.

The revolving light that he had seen became more distinct; but the boat was evidently drifting slowly past it to the north-east. Another light hove in sight: it remained visible for ten minutes, and then faded and returned again. It was the 'Sunk light,' well known to navigators in that sea.

Had Carrell possessed Stedman's knowledge he would have learnt that he was now in a part of the channel where there were no more sands, except one or two far apart, and which were

covered even at low water by many fathoms of water. As it was, these lights shining out and returning again, seemed to him like eyes remorselessly watching him as he drifted to destruction. His ears were haunted by a noise similar to the roaring of breakers ; and indistinct shapes, like the forms of giant vessels, appeared bearing down upon him in the gloom. Then there seemed to come a cry across the sea, like a cry for help ; he dropped the tiller, and putting his hand to his ear, listened for it again : but he heard it no more. It was but the whistling of the wind in the rigging, which his fancy from time to time interpreted into the sound of human voices.

Now and then he crept to Isabel's side, and heard her still muttering a prayer for those whom they had lost ; and he whispered to her a few words of comfort.

‘I think the storm is moderating,’ he said. But her thoughts were not of herself.

‘Can they have escaped ?’ she asked. ‘Tell me—is there any hope ?’

‘Anything is possible to Him who hears your prayers,’ answered Carrell.

‘How far were we from land ?’

‘I cannot tell. Unhappily, I am no seaman, and am ignorant of this coast.’

Carrell stopped, with the thought that his words might alarm her, but she was thinking only of the horrors of that moment in which their two companions, who had sailed from home so happily that morning, had been snatched away to destruction. The tension of a grief like this soon wears out the strength, and brings relief in sleep. When Carrell crept to her side again her silence alarmed him. She was lying reclining with her head upon the back of the seat ; and he placed his ear near her face, and found her breathing peacefully.

‘Poor thing ! She sleeps. Thank Heaven,’ he murmured.

Isabel was indeed sinking into slumber at this moment ; but his words, uttered so near her face, aroused her. She heard them with a grateful heart. Carrell knew nothing of this, but crept back to the tiller again, as if he dreaded being detected even in praying for her safety.

He had hardly felt the loneliness of their position until then. Around them was the rolling sea, full of perils terrible and unknown. Her life was in his charge ; but he was almost powerless to help her. At any moment there might come a crash, and the little boat be shattered to pieces in the breakers. He was an



expert swimmer, and might bear her up for awhile; but for how long? and to what purpose in that dismal sea?

In her sleep, or in the half-slumber which comes down on eyelids weary with weeping, Isabel was conscious from time to time of some hand which raised her head a little, and wrapped her closer in her covering, to protect her from the wind. These little services were performed with a tenderness which seemed to soothe her into pleasant dreams.

Once she awoke with a strong belief that she had been again listening to some one near her praying earnestly for her safety, and imploring Heaven not to let the sins of another bring retribution upon the frail bark which carried an innocent life. She knew that her protector chafed her hands from time to time, and held them tenderly between his own for warmth.

In this way the night wore on; the lightning became less frequent, but the sea was still heavy. Carrell looked astern anxiously from time to time for any sign of approaching daylight, but the clouds were heavy. It seemed to him that the outline of her figure became more distinct, and he watched it anxiously. Suddenly she awoke, and with a shriek of joy that went to his heart, cried aloud—‘They are saved!’

Carrell started, and gazed around with a superstitious feeling. It seemed to him as if she was endowed with some mysterious power of revealing the secret of that dread darkness which encompassed them around.

‘May your prophecy prove true,’ he said.

There was a gleam of dawn in the sky, for her features were clearly visible to him as she rose and clutched his arm wildly.

‘It was but a dream,’ she said ; ‘but oh, I have dreamed it so long, that I will take it for a good omen. I was dozing there,’ she continued in hurried tones. ‘You came and knelt at my side and prayed ; I listened ; and after that I fell asleep and saw Stedman and her whom I thought dead. They came to me somehow from across the sea ; they walked upon the deck smiling ; and then they came again, and Stedman carried her in his arms. I dreamed of them thus a third and a fourth time ; and sometimes we were here, and sometimes ashore, walking by the beach where I first met you. Why should I dream like this ? My heart was heavy when I tried to get rest. They say that dreams are the reflex of our waking thoughts. But my thoughts were thoughts of despair. I had no hope till these

bright visions came. Oh, tell me, Ishmael, am I foolish to talk thus ?'

'No !' he exclaimed passionately; 'I will hold to the hope that you have awakened. I have faith that they are saved.'

She clung to him still, and he placed his arm around her, and with one hand smoothed back her dripping hair, and kissed her on the forehead. And then, oh, moment of delight, and yet of terror and despair ! she kissed him in return, in the frankness of her gratitude and joy.

There was less of motion in the boat, and Isabel perceived it and said—

'Thank heaven, the wind is dropping.'

Carrell replied—

'The lightning is less frequent too. And see there, the day is dawning.'

He still supported her with one arm, grasping the tiller with the other, as she turned and looked to leeward. A pale streak was in the eastern horizon, against which the masts and rigging of a large vessel scudding down channel was clearly visible. The clouds were broken in that direction, for the pale streak grew golden, and the blessed daylight spread upon the sea. The rain had ceased now. A cold chill shot through her, and she shivered as her companion

placed her gently on the cushion again, and went forward to look around. Her faith in the truth of her dream had communicated itself to him, and he ascended the shrouds almost with a hope of seeing some lifeboat or other vessel, in which Stedman and his charge had been rescued ; but none was visible.

He returned to her sorrowfully and said, 'I can see nothing.'

'Ah, me ; pray look once more,' she murmured.

Carrell hastened to the shrouds again, and climbed up by the broken rigging to the point where the topmast had been broken off by the storm. From this height he could see the horizon every way ; but there was nothing in sight except the great vessels that were scudding in the far distance, a lightboat at the entrance to a channel, and the huge buoys around which the white surf was breaking.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE BEACON.

THE spot at which Stedman and Mrs. Clayter had been swept into the sea was at least six miles from land. Even if they had drifted shoreward it was impossible that two persons could live long in such a surf; it was equally certain that they could find no aid from human hands. No sort of vessel could have picked them up in a rolling sea unless it had been the lifeboat, and there was no wreck anywhere near the spot that night to cause a lifeboat to be out. Their case was dismal indeed.

Carrell's conjecture that the old man had been struck by some portion of the falling topmast or tackling was correct. The blow had stunned him and deprived him of speech, but the instinct with which men cling to life survives even consciousness. Death itself will often fail to compel a drowning man to relax his hold of some object to which he has clung in the vain hope of sustaining himself; and the dead bodies of shipwrecked mariners have been found still

grasping in their rigid hands some fragment of a wreck or broken spar. It is not surprising, therefore, that Stedman, as he recovered from the first effects of the blow that he had received, found himself holding to the shattered topmast, which, with the rent topsail and portions of the rigging, was beating about in the angry sea. Mrs. Clayter clung to him with the frantic energy of terror and despair; but in this forlorn situation the old man's sense of duty to the captain did not forsake him. He shifted himself, and holding the spar by his right arm, clasped the lady round the waist by the other, and encouraged her to depend on that support.

Stedman knew that the great seas on which they rose and fell would inevitably exhaust them in a short time. The floating mass in which they were involved was continually submerged as it fell from the crest of a wave, carrying them under water for a moment, till it rose again and they gasped for air. Then the pitiless sea struck them and tossed them aside, as the wind will sweep a straw from the ground, the driving rain smote them in the face, and the lightning blazed out and revealed to their gaze all the terrors of the scene.

In one of these intervals Stedman had grasped at a rope that was attached to the sail. It would

not have been difficult for him to have wound it about his companion and himself, and so to have lashed themselves to the spar ; but the hopelessness of their situation made such a precaution of little value. 'I can hold on,' he thought, 'while we both have strength ; and when that is gone, of what avail to be beaten about in the sea ? Better she should die at once, poor thing, than be drowned by inches where there's no help.'

Still he held on, and now and then spoke some word of encouragement to the lady, who heard and understood ; for after the first shock of horror is passed, great peril arouses the faculties, even in the weakest. They had now been scarcely a quarter of an hour in the water ; but exhaustion was already approaching. He knew that it was but a question of minutes. The hatchboat had drifted far away, and they were alone in the wild ocean. He closed his eyes and prayed.

Suddenly, as a wave swept him forward, he became aware of the curious fact that his feet had touched ground. It was but for an instant, for the sea carried them away again. This was no delusion of a drowning man. A second time he felt it, firm and hard for a moment, like a sandy beach ; and again the receding waves

carried him back into the sea. Then came a higher sea still, which hurried them on with a terrible swiftness. It seemed to bear them a long way to the right, as if they were on the top of a ridge of wave that was breaking on a shore. It sank, and they were left upon dry ground.

Stedman knew that the wave would return immediately. His strength came back to him in the excitement of the moment, and seizing his companion, he dragged her half senseless up the sand. Even there, the returning seas overtook them and struck them down; but they were too far distant to be carried away again. He recovered his footing, and dragging his companion still higher, found that the next waves only swept them with their spray.

The transition from what seemed inevitable death to hope and life was so sudden that he had not yet been able to perceive the cause of that miraculous respite from destruction; but the truth soon revealed itself. They were still many miles from land, but the waves had cast them upon one of those extensive sands in this part of the Channel of which portions are dry at low water. They were then not quite at the flood, and Stedman remembered that this was the period of the spring tides, which both



rise higher and fall lower than the ordinary tides. He knew that at this season they might hope that the sands would remain uncovered by the sea for about an hour. After that the waves would break over them again, and the tract, which now afforded them a temporary refuge, would once more be undistinguishable from the ocean around.

The situation was forlorn enough, but, as compared with the past, it seemed like a sudden deliverance. Mrs. Clayter knelt down and returned thanks for their merciful deliverance: the old man dared not tell her of the new dangers that awaited them, but he bade her keep heart. The spot, he said, was dangerous, and escape from it in the darkness would be difficult. He would see what could be done.

The tide was receding, and he crept back to the spot at which they had been cast on the sand. His hope was to find the broken spars, the sail-cloth, and ropes there. By help of these he might at least prepare some better means of sustaining themselves than he could have made while on the sea; with this, when the waves returned, they might take their chance of floating again. The hope was a poor one, but there seemed to be no other; and the time was too short for hesitation. He groped about

on the sand, but could find no trace of the wreck, and the lightning soon disclosed to him the fact that it had been carried away by the sea. The wave that had cast them ashore had, in fact, borne it away again, and driven it further down the Channel, to be cast upon some other part of the sands, which was inaccessible to him.

Thus they had lost the support which had sufficed till then to preserve their lives; but Stedman could not help remembering that if he had lashed himself and his charge to the spar, as he had intended, their lives would inevitably have been sacrificed. It would have been impossible to have disengaged themselves from it at the moment of drifting on to their temporary resting-place; and to have been cast upon the sands again and again while bound fast to the floating topmast, would have been certain to have rendered them insensible and completed their destruction. In times of distress and danger the mind seizes eagerly upon such signs of mercy. Stedman returned to the lady, led her, shivering and exhausted, up the sandy plain to a dryer point, and told her how God's providence had prevented his taking a step for their preservation by which they would certainly have lost their lives before then. The humblest man becomes eloquent at such times.

The poor lady thanked him and blessed him in her heart.

‘Now, ma’am,’ said the old man, ‘I’ll take the measure of this desert place, and see what can be done ; only you sit there, and don’t cry or fret till I return.’

The lady sat on the sand, which was firm and dry, and forgot the terrors of the tempest, and even the fearful lightning, in the comfort that his words had brought her ; for she did not know that such refuges were generally places of lingering death : indeed, she had but a confused sense of being on sands somewhere, from which it was difficult in the darkness to find their way.

He found that the strip of sand was but a few hundred yards wide ; but it was shaped like the back of some monstrous whale, and was much longer than it was broad. He followed it one way for nearly half a mile before he found it slope down to the sea again. Beyond that, he could see at intervals the revolving light that Carrell had observed, but at what distance it was hard to say, for high crests of waves cut it off from his sight, revealing it only in momentary glimpses, when it appeared blurred and dim through the spray. Anyway, there could come no help from there.

He pursued his survey still further ; but it was only when the lightning flashed that he could get a glimpse of the shape and limits of the sand. To windward the sea rolled in with a continuous noise, on the lee side it was less violent ; but every way the wild surf roared like a beast of prey angry at their sudden escape, and eager to attack them again. Once or twice he stumbled over some small fragment of a wreck, which reminded him again of the horrible fact that the waters, when the tide was in, covered the very spot where he stood. It seemed to him that the sea was already returning. Now and then there was a lull in the storm of rain for a few moments, when he could feel the salt spray that swept in his face. The tide was evidently rising fast.

He made his way back to Mrs. Clayter ; his heart was full of thoughts of his old home, but he spoke no word of discouragement to his companion.

‘ What need to tell her,’ he thought, ‘ that in a quarter of an hour, if not sooner, we must be swept off again without so much as a spar to hold by ? Poor lady ! and the poor captain too.’

Mrs. Clayter asked him when they might hope to find their way off the sands.

‘Not yet, ma’am,’ replied the old man ; ‘ we must be patient for awhile.’

His heart smote him for this amount of deception. ‘Hard to have to deceive her at such a time,’ he thought ; and the tears rolled down his cheeks. ‘But how can I tell her to lay down and die?’

He turned away to avoid her questionings, and walked again towards the point at which they had drifted on to the sands. It was scarcely a hundred paces now to where the rolling surf subsided, and the tide rose so fast that it seemed but a few seconds before that the sea was again sweeping over that spot so heavily that it was impossible to stand there. Then one huge wave rose high above his head and broke in thunder on the sand, compelling him to retreat again almost to the spot at which his companion sat terrified and weeping.

Stedman lifted her, and said hurriedly, ‘Come, we’ll look for a better place.’ But he knew well that no spot could be found which would afford them shelter for more than a few minutes. The sands on which he was cast were unknown to him, but he was well aware that there were no sands in that sea which could save them from the terrible tide which was now close upon his heels, as he carried her trembling. To

struggle further seemed useless, but the instinct of man's nature impelled him to new efforts to escape.

He ran wildly along the ridge of the sand-bank, in the opposite direction to that in which he had walked at first. The sea was roaring that way—roaring on the right, roaring on the left, striking him in the face when a gust took the top of a high wave, and sent the foam driving like a whirlwind of sleet across that treacherous island. Still the bargeman ran, bearing his fainting companion aloft—a strange sight if any craft then driving down the channel could have caught a glimpse of them for one moment as the lightning flashed again, and lit up the ocean with its trembling blaze. But stranger still had been the sound of a human voice crying aloud to heaven upon that desolate waste among the stormy breakers. It was the voice of Stedman.

‘Look there! look there!’ he cried, ‘there’s succour at hand. Ay, succour indeed. Better far than any craft worked by human hands could give us in this sea. Cheer up. It’s close at hand.’ But his companion was too much terrified to understand his words.

The lightning had revealed to the old man

an object, towards which he was now making his way. It would have been to ordinary eyes like the mast of a small vessel with some object on its summit ; but Stedman knew well that no vessel driven on those sands could rear its mast aloft like that. The mast was the stem of a safety beacon which had lately been erected on that sand. The object on its summit was an iron cage capable of holding three or four persons, and standing some feet above the highest tides known in that part. It was borne up by iron cables pegged into the sands, like the ropes that support a canvas tent against the assaults of the wind, and the sides of the upright pole, which was in truth the mast of a vessel imbedded for firm foundation in the sand, were furnished with notches and brackets by which a seaman could easily climb to the top. The whole erection presented so little of surface to the sea that the wildest tempest would have assailed it in vain. As he drew nearer, the outline of the beacon against the sky became dimly visible even in the darkness. The waves were already rolling up to its base ; but he clutched the support, and stepping on to the first bracket, took breath. Then, holding his charge in his left arm, he raised himself by degrees, and deposited her in safety in the cage.

Mrs. Clayter was scarcely conscious of the change until he aroused her.

‘Look you here,’ he said: ‘I’m a poor man, and don’t know how to pray fit for such a time as this. Say a prayer, ma’am; oh, do say a prayer. To think I should have saved you after all, for the captain to see you again. Poor gentleman, what’s he doin’ now, I wonder? Frettin’ a bit, I warrant. Why it was but a minute ago death seemed as near as I am now to you; and no help, no shelter, not a bit of anythin’ even to hold on to. And look now. Why, bless you, ma’am, you’re as safe here till daylight as if you was in the Rile Hotel in Claytersville: every bit as safe, and hardly a bit more lonely. But never mind about that to-night. I won’t think of anythin’ but heaven’s mercy to a couple of poor drowned wretches.’

His companion revived under the influence of his hopeful words, and said—

‘Where’s our boat? And where are Isabel and Ishmael?’

‘Ay,’ said the old man, suddenly dropping his voice; ‘I had forgotten them. But never fear; Ishmael’s got sense in his head, and won’t forget what I told him—I mean, how to keep her up to the wind, and all that. She’s weathered many a worse night in the herring



season. Dark November nights, ma'am, blowing north-easters, and a lee shore.'

The sudden revulsion of feeling had carried the old man to a high point of excitement, in which his tongue ran on in this fashion. Mrs. Clayter found relief in listening to him, and was grateful for his attempts to cheer her. So they passed the weary hours till daylight, the surf roaring around them, and the waters dashing at times against the shaft of the beacon and casting the salt spray high above their heads.

About the time when Isabel Frere awoke from her prophetic dream, the two were still safely sheltered in the beacon cage, looking across the sea for the first dawn of day. When it came, and the storm abated, and the daylight spread, they too scanned the horizon, and were distressed in spirit at perceiving no sign of the little craft.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A CHANGE.

THE part of the channel in which Stedman and his companion had been thus miraculously rescued is much frequented in favourable weather. The two figures in the cage of the safety beacon were seen by a fishing-smack about three hours after daylight, the master of which lay to until the tide was deep on the sands, and then put off his boat. Stedman and Mrs. Clayter were taken aboard the smack, and provided with such comforts as the master could offer, while the little vessel put in for the shore, and at high water sailed into the little channel and up the creek whence they had set sail the day before.

It fared otherwise with Carrell and Isabel. The loss of her topmast, and other injuries which had resulted to the little craft from the gale of the night, had rendered her difficult to manage except in scudding before the wind, which began to drop almost with the same suddenness with which it had arisen. The sun

shone out bright and strong; but to the west and north-west a haze hung over the waters, and no land became visible. The sea was still agitated; but it was with the ground-swell only, for the ensign of the little vessel hung idly at the peak, and her canvas was scarcely filled. Before five hours after daylight it was almost a calm, and the hatchboat hardly made three knots an hour. Carrell endeavoured to stand in for the land, but their progress was still slow, and he was ignorant of how far they had drifted out to sea.

Some vessels passed them, but they were too far to answer hail. About noon a heavy one-masted fishing-boat, of that peculiar liquorice colour in which Dutchmen delight, passed nearer, and Carrell hailed it, and asked how far the land was and in which quarter. But the man who came upon the poop answered him in an unintelligible tongue, and his boat was soon beyond speaking range. If they had been on a wreck or in the beacon in which Stedman had found refuge, their position would soon have been observed by some vessel or lightboat; but the loss of a topmast in a gale is too simple an occurrence to attract attention, and Carrell was ignorant of any other means of indicating distress.

Isabel looked pale and worn ; her clothing was saturated with the sea water, and the salt became visible in the curls of her dark hair as it dried in the wind and sun. The cabin, being at a lower level than the cockpit, was still so much flooded that Carrell spent some time in baling it out with a bowl which he had found in the forecastle, and in drying and making it habitable. Isabel still refused to go below. She was sorrowful and dejected at the non-fulfilment of her dream ; though her faith that Stedman and his companion were safe had not yet left her.

Carrell did his best to sustain her in the faith that it was of good omen ; but his heart was heavy with forebodings of the future. The slow progress which they made, and that enforced idleness in the warm sunshine, made the suspense still more wearisome. It was impossible to foretell when they might reach the shore ; the haze on the sea limited their horizon one way to a short distance, while on the other side they could see none but large vessels, which were standing well out to sea.

In the afternoon the warmth became oppressive. The drops that had glistened at daybreak on every bit of cordage, and edge of bulwark, and end of canvas, had vanished ; the planking

of the deck had steamed until it had dried white. Even in the cockpit every trace of moisture had disappeared. The iron stanchions in the bulwarks had become hot to the touch, and the paint on the cabin door, and the pitch on the side of the bulwark, seemed to blister in the sun. It was again sultry and oppressive; and the thunderstorm had produced so little effect in cooling the atmosphere, that Carrell began to fear that it might be succeeded by another storm; but the sky was clear every way.

From time to time he left the tiller for awhile, and again climbed the shrouds to where the topmast had broken away. Each time the rocking of the boat seemed less, until at last it was scarcely perceptible. The ground-swell was subsiding, and the air was so light that it wanted now but little to a dead calm. Still there came no vessel within speaking range, except a long, black screw steamer. To this Carrell made signs by waving his jacket over his head. A man appeared on the after-deck, and shouted across the sea through a speaking-trumpet—

‘What do you want?’

Carrell held his hands to his mouth in the form of a tube, and shouted with all his strength—

‘How far’s the land?’

But it was evident that those aboard the

screw-vessel could not hear him. She was going entirely under steam, and Carrell observed that her engines were reversed slowly. In a few minutes he drifted nearer to her, and shouted again—

‘How far’s the land?’

‘What land?’

‘Any land on the English coast.’

Another man, who seemed to be the captain or mate of the vessel, came aft and shouted—

‘Steer for it and you’ll see. Who but a lubber would bring a ship to for to ask how far the land is?’

The hatchboat was now only a few cables’ length under the stern of the steam-vessel, and Carrell’s voice could be heard plainly aboard.

‘I’m ignorant of which direction to steer in. Our master was swept overboard in the gale last night, and I’ve a lady aboard, and know but little of navigation.’

‘Ay, ay; that’s different,’ replied the man. ‘If your master went overboard in the gale last night, he’ll never sail a hatchboat again. You’re as near as can be seven-and-twenty miles south by east of Orfordness High Light.’

‘Can you take us in tow?’

‘Where to? I’m bound for South Shields, and shall touch no land before then. Put her

head north by west, and you'll see the light some time to-night. If you're becalmed, lay to till morning, and make for the shore.'

'Is the navigation dangerous?'

'Little enough for your cockle-shell. Keep the Shipwash Light on your lee bow. You'll know it as the first you'll see to-night. Good-day. I wish you a safe voyage.'

Carrell called out his thanks to the speaker, but the screw was already revolving again, sending a long line of foam astern, and there was a bustle on deck which balked further inquiry. In a few minutes the steam-vessel was again on her way, and out of speaking range.

Carrell watched her till she grew small on the horizon, her immense trail of smoke stretched far behind her upon the lazy air for many a league. No other vessel was near, although there were several visible.

Isabel had at last retired into the cabin, by Carrell's advice, to endeavour to get rest after the fatigue and terror of the night; for her sleep during the storm had been brief and disturbed, and she was still weary with weeping. She was below during his colloquy with the steam-vessel, and as she did not come on deck, he knew that she must be sleeping. Carrell

took this opportunity of going forward and taking stock of the resources of the little vessel.

She had a keg of water aboard, quite sufficient to last them until the morrow. That he knew when he had conveyed a supply of water into the cabin for Isabel. In the sail-room he found a lantern with a candle, some wood and matches, and a little stove that could be moved on to the deck, with kettles and other means of cooking and making water hot. There were also the remains of their repast of the day before, besides bread, tea, and other things; for Stedman had the bargeman's habit of stocking the cabin well with provisions, and had no very exact standard in his mind of ladies' appetites. 'Anyway,' thought Carrell, 'this will not be a case of starvation on a wreck. Land will be in sight at daybreak to-morrow at latest, and here's food for two days.' He then washed himself in a very small quantity of water, and felt refreshed.

It was late in the afternoon when Isabel reappeared at the cabin door. She looked paler; but she had made a hasty toilet, and her clothing had dried in the sun of that morning. That melancholy expression which he had so often



observed in her features seemed to have grown deeper and more settled ; but her excitement had passed, and she spoke calmly—

‘Is the land in sight, Ishmael?’

‘Not yet, unhappily. It is almost a calm, and I have lost my way from ignorance of the bearing of the coast ; but I am standing in for the shore now.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘I spoke a vessel while you were sleeping, and they gave me the bearing—north-west twenty-seven miles to Orfordness.’

‘Is that far from Claytersville?’

‘Many miles, I think ; but I do not know how far.’

‘When do you think we may reach that point?’

‘I fear much that we may have to pass another night at sea. It would not be safe for me, who am no seaman, to endeavour to make the land in the darkness. But it is fine, and there will be no danger in lying to till morning.’

‘I am not going to vex you with idle complaints,’ she said. ‘You have been very kind and thoughtful, and I will be patient in return.’

She sat again on the cushion in the cockpit, where she had passed the terrible night before, and resting her face on her hand, looked across

the sea. Meanwhile Carrell went to work in the fore-castle, and prepared her refreshments ; but she would take nothing except some tea, for which she thanked him, and drank it eagerly.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## DREAMS AND REMINISCENCES.

AFTER that, Carrell took up his position again at the helm. The day declined; the sun set glorious, in a plain of gold; the dusk crept slowly from the east and spread upon the sea. He watched the gathering darkness; but Isabel's face was half turned towards him, and was lighted with the reflection of the western sky. The ripple of the water against the bow of the vessel was hardly audible; the mainsail flapped idly: and they seemed to glide into a world of dreams. The terrors of the night before were to Carrell like a scene in which he had acted at some far-off time. The little vessel drifting onward silently—the woman who had influenced him so strangely from the first time that he had met her, and with whom he now found himself alone and face to face in the midst of that ocean solitude—were these mere phantoms of his brain?

The fatigue and anxiety, which he had endured had wrought in him no desire for sleep,

but only that excitement of the nervous system which supplies so strangely the place of strength and endurance. He was, indeed, unusually wakeful, and felt as if no amount of watching or of labour could exhaust his spirit. But the mind, in such moods, has no healthy activity. Its ideas are confused ; it is subject to hallucinations. So Carrell, contemplating the scene around him, was visited with fancies which he knew to be merely fancies, and which yet haunted and perplexed him. The face and the clothing of his companion seemed to him to glow with a light which increased as the twilight deepened. This light touched even her dark hair, and fell reflected on the dusky sail-cloth, which was flapping gently like the wings of a huge bird of night above her head. Then there seemed to him to be some figure behind her on the deck, watching them both. It was a return of that wild fancy which had visited him in his flight across the marsh. Its hands were still raised aloft, as if to warn him once more ; but to warn him of what ? Of gliding in their little bark on to some treacherous sand-bank ; or of drifting onwards to some other wreck in which he alone would bear part—the wreck of himself upon the shoals and quicksands of a foolish passion.

The scene was too soothing to his spirit for him to dwell constantly on thoughts like these. The little hatchboat gliding onward still seemed to be carrying him forward into a new life and another world, wherein pleasure had no bitter awakening, and these doubts and perplexities would have no place. Eastward still towards the rising sun the little vessel kept her way, not lying to, for there was no wind to make her course dangerous, and the land would hardly be reached before daybreak. The light that the captain of the steam-vessel had spoken of was still far away upon her larboard bow, shining like a red speck of fire upon the level of the water. Above, the stars shone out, as they shone upon that terrible night when he had lingered on the river bank, debating between life and death, and longing for the peace and rest which seemed to await him on the opposite shore. Now there stood in the distance before him no shore, but only the dim horizon line beneath which the future lay concealed, like the coming glory of the dawn. So let the vessel drift, and the night pass away on that enchanted sea.

But why was he troubled still with that old fancy of a woman's figure? In vain to whisper to himself that its drapery was but the folds of

the jib as it hung heavily in the silent air. It chilled him from time to time, and disturbed him in his reveries. It was not to be avoided by turning his gaze aside, for he was conscious of its presence even then. Should he go forward and convince himself, by the evidence of touch and sight, that this was but the creation of a mind over-worn by watching and fatigue? The effort would be idle, for he knew the sails were there; and yet this figure haunted him still. But should he ask his companion to look back and tell him what this thing was, which now stood so plainly before him that his hold relaxed upon the tiller?

The sea was phosphorescent that night; the ripple, as it parted gently from the cutwater of the vessel, and passed astern, glittered now and then with a strange fire. Carrell saw it, wondering. About midnight the eastern sky grew white, and the stars that way became rarer, eclipsed in the half-light that precedes the rising of the moon. The orb rose slowly from the waters, lengthening out her shaft of yellow light across the sea. As she rose, the dusky outline of some vessel on the horizon line passed slowly across her golden disk, and gave to her aspect something fantastic and unreal. Presently the line of light came down to the little vessel, and touched her sails

and sides, and quenched the fires that had played about her in a deeper flame.

Isabel had scarcely spoken for an hour past. Her voice startled him.

‘You are weary, Ishmael,’ she said. ‘Pray take rest.’

‘Daylight will be here in a few hours, when we can run in for the shore. I can rest then.’

‘This is the second night that you have been without sleep. Why not rest now? I can watch awhile.’

‘It would not be prudent to leave you in charge of the boat, even in such weather. Besides, I am restless, and could not sleep.’

‘I fear you are too anxious for my safety.’

‘I am anxious ; but it is with reason. There are dangers at sea, even in the calmest weather.’

‘Without you I am helpless indeed,’ she answered imploringly ; ‘but if you should be overcome with fatigue we must both perish. It may be that at daybreak the land will still be far off. Perhaps we have missed our way, and to-morrow may bring us no succour.’

‘Never fear,’ replied Carrell. ‘I can see my course by the stars to-night. We are sailing now as near as can be north-east. To-morrow’s dawn will certainly find us near the land ; but I must watch till then.’

The moon rose higher, growing a purer silver as she escaped from the thin haze upon the waters. Her flood of light streamed across the placid sea like a broad highway before them, down which they slowly sailed. Isabel was silent again for a long time, still gazing thoughtfully at that scene of tranquillity and beauty which had followed so strangely from the terrors and miseries which they had endured. This time it was Carrell who spoke. He asked her if she did not feel a chill from the night dews ; but she answered that the air was warm, and that she required no other clothing.

‘I was thinking just now,’ she added, ‘how happy I might have been sailing thus but for the thought that haunts me still. If I could but believe that they are saved, these long hours would pass swiftly enough.’

Carrell answered, ‘Your faith in your dream inspired me with hope. Why should we change our faith for these doubts?’

‘True ; I am selfish, and forget that poor Stedman was your friend. Believe me, I will never speak despondingly again.’

‘For your own sake keep heart,’ replied Carrell.

‘Let us talk of other things, then,’ she said, and it seemed to him as if her voice changed



again, and took once more the old tone which had rung in his ears all that day when he had first met her on the beach.

‘Is your native home far from here?’ she asked.

‘Very far; I came from Devonshire, where my parents died.’

‘Was that long since?’

‘More than ten years. I was a child then.’

‘And had you no one to supply their place?’

‘Yes, one; an uncle.’

‘Was he kind to you?’

Carrell hesitated a moment, and replied—

‘As kind as his nature would permit. I saw little of him till I left school. He was a stern man, and we quarrelled and parted for ever.’

‘That was a pity,’ she answered. ‘If he was a good man at heart, could you not have been reconciled?’

‘It was too late,’ replied her companion.

There ensued a long pause. By what fatality she was thus led to question him about his early life he knew not; but the subject had to him a singular fascination. Could the Stedmans have told her the story of his strange adventure on the night of his escape from the officers? This was the question which now disturbed him, and

seemed to constrain him to pursue the conversation.

‘You see, madam,’ he continued, ‘I was a wild lad—not wholly bad, I hope, at least not then. I hated constraint as I hate it now. I was more apt at feats of strength and agility—at athletic exercises and things of the kind, than at books. My uncle was a studious man, and was disappointed in me. I saw his disappointment, and fretted under it. And then, as I have said, I had a love of liberty, which amounted to a passion. I could not breathe under his stern rule. So, at least, I thought, and yet——’

He stopped abruptly. Isabel had perceived that his utterance grew thick with emotion, and she blamed herself for drawing him into a conversation which was painful; but she took up the thread of their discourse for a moment, to relieve his embarrassment.

‘I share your feeling,’ she said. ‘I would be free as the air, and value nothing in a home whose walls are like those of a prison. I have been happier in that deserted town than I have ever been elsewhere, since I was a girl; only because there was freedom there and the sunshine, the open country and the sea.’

After this, she delighted her companion by telling him of her childhood, her school life;

of that flight from Brussels of which her father had spoken to Captain Clayter. She touched lightly on the story of her mother's death ; but sketched at large her own solitary life in an ancient gloomy mansion in London, shut in by sooty trees which excluded the light and sunshine, until the very flags of its paved fore-court were green with mould.

Carrell listened and was silent, so that she began to think that her device for diverting his thoughts from painful things had failed. Then she racked her brain for new subjects, and wondered, in her innocence, that all themes seemed alike to him ; for so long as she would talk without questioning him, he was silent still.

The fading moon gave at length the first token of day. The long line of the coast was visible in the twilight at a few miles under their lee. As the light increased, they could see that there were high cliffs along the shore. There was no harbour there ; but the tide was receding about two hours after daybreak when Carrell ran the little vessel gently on to the sand.

He lifted his companion in his arms, and sprang with her ashore. The spot was wild and desolate. No village or even house had

met their gaze as they had looked towards it from the sea ; and above them the yellow sand-cliffs rose almost perpendicularly, sterile and bare.

He helped her over the rough shingle, and the pools of salt water in the hollow places in the sand ; and thus they walked together, hand in hand, until the hatchboat behind them had dwindled to a speck, lying high and dry upon the shore.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## HOMEWARD.

CARRELL and his companion walked on for nearly two miles before they found any break in the cliff. The opening was a natural recess, in which steps had been cut in the side of the sandy rock. They ascended and found before them no village, but only a row of low wooden houses pitched or painted black. He knew by the flagstaff near them that these were the buildings of a coast-guard station.

The watchman of the coast-guard, although he had been invisible to them, had seen their boat come ashore, and had been observing them through his glass as they walked upon the beach. Their movements had puzzled him; but as they had not at all the appearance of bold smugglers, and were moreover proceeding leisurely in a direction which smugglers would certainly have avoided, he waited patiently until he saw them ascend the cliff.

Carrell approached him, and asked the name of the place.

The man replied, 'Barwell Gap.'

'How far from Claytersville?'

'Isn't that below the Naze?'

'Yes, a long way.'

'Then it will be a good forty miles from here, if not more, and a roundabout way, too, you'll find it after you get to Bawsey.'

'Who is your chief officer?'

'Lieutenant Higson.'

'Can we see him?'

'Not very well,' replied the man; 'he's gone with the young ladies to Aldborough Fair.'

It was evident that the forlorn, weather-beaten appearance of the two strangers did not inspire the man with respect. He surveyed his questioner from head to foot, and then glanced at Isabel with an insolent air of curiosity which compelled her to drop her eyes.

'What do you want with him?' he added.

Carrell told him briefly the story of their misfortunes, and pointed to the hatchboat far off in evidence of their distress.

Another officer, who had come out of one of the black wooden houses during this colloquy, approached them. Then a woman appeared at the door from which he had issued, and it was evident that the unusual sight of strangers in that solitary spot was causing some commotion

- in the buildings. The new-comer proved to be the chief boatman of the station, and Carrell repeated to him the story of their troubles at sea, and of their desire to return to Claytersville by any conveyance that could be found.

‘I doubt you’ll find nothing in this part of Suffolk,’ replied the man; ‘can’t you sail up?’

‘Our boat is disabled,’ returned Carrell, ‘and I am unskilful in navigating her.’

‘Then you had better get on to the next town, and you’ll have a chance of finding some help. It’s seven miles hence——’

‘Seven and a quarter, sir,’ interrupted the surly watchman.

‘Or seven and a quarter,’ echoed the chief boatman. ‘If the lady can’t walk,’ he added, ‘she’s welcome to remain here till her friends can fetch her.’

The woman who had approached them, and heard some part of their discourse, here interposed—

‘That she is, I’m sure,’ she said; ‘and bad enough she must want rest, I should think, poor child.’

Isabel drew instinctively nearer to the speaker, and said she was grateful for her kindness; but that she could not rest anywhere while her friends were in suspense.

‘Then you’ll stay just a little, dear,’ said the woman kindly; ‘and wash, and refresh yourself a bit. It’s a sad thing for a young lady to beat about two nights at sea; and in such a storm too. Come, now.’

Her manner was so kind and gentle, that Isabel was constrained to accept her offer. The chief boatman also turned out to be less churlish than his manner had betokened. He brought Carrell some refreshment, and promised to have the hatchboat cared for until the owner could take charge of it.

Carrell wished Isabel to remain while he returned as quickly as possible to Claytersville; but she was firm.

‘I must go on,’ she said, ‘while I have strength. When that fails me I will stop.’

An hour later they started on their journey, taking their way by a path that wound along the top of the cliff. It was nearly noon, and the sun was hot; but they walked quickly. They met no one, nor did they pass any habitation for some miles, until they came to a lighthouse on a high point. Carrell turned aside to enquire his way here, and learnt that they were in the right path, and half-way to the town which the coast-guardsman had indicated. The lighthouse-man pointed out to them a way



across the fields, by which they might shorten the remainder of their journey.

Now and then Isabel consented to loiter awhile; but Carrell soon perceived that it was less for her own sake than out of consideration for him; for she remembered that he had had no rest since they had left home. After that, he ceased to ask her to stop; and they kept on their way wearily, but without a pause. It was but little past two in the afternoon when they came to the town which the coast-guardsmen had spoken of. They were dusty and tired, and the cottagers on the outskirts eyed them curiously as they passed. Carrell was reminded of his own wanderings before he found work at the excavation, when the very looks of comfortable, well-to-do people at farm-houses and road-side villas seemed to threaten him with the gaol; and when mothers, eyeing his forlorn appearance, would gather their children behind them till he had passed out of sight. By what strange fatality was he to find himself again a weary and dusty wayfarer, in companionship with one whose life had been so different from his? Was the name which he had taken in bitterness, and which his companion repeated so often, a token of his future life? and had his destiny of a wanderer and

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an outcast a sinister influence upon those who came in contact with him even for a brief time?

Such fancies as these floated in his mind as he walked through the long straggling street of the town; but he endeavoured to cheer his tired companion.

‘It is but for a little while longer,’ he said. ‘We are in a civilised place here, where we are certain to find assistance.’

Isabel smiled and thanked him, and they walked faster. The principal inn of the town was but a few paces further, with its welcome sign-board, bearing the emblem of a crown and a rose, swinging on an iron rod across the roadway. It proved welcome indeed to them, for the landlord had received news from Claytersville, both of the hatchboat being missing and of the rescue of Stedman and Mrs. Clayter. Frere and the captain had ridden along the coast on the night before, in opposite directions, giving intelligence at fishing villages and towns, and had, besides, sent a sailing-boat in search of them, which had missed them by reason of their having drifted so far from the scene of Stedman’s accident.

‘You’ll get home to-night, miss,’ said the landlord, who was a ruddy little man, with thin

sandy hair and a twinkling eye, 'and a joyful thing it'll be, to be sure. From here to Claytersville isn't a yard less than thirty-seven miles ; but I've a pair shall do it with just a rest and a bait on the road.'

Carrell got refreshment while the horses were being harnessed to an open carriage ; and Isabel retired with the landlady and made preparations for the journey. In half an hour they were ready. The driver took his seat on the box, Carrell helped Isabel to mount, and they sat together, with their faces turned towards the destination at which they were so anxious to arrive. The landlord and landlady, and the few guests who were staying at the Rose and Crown, came out to see them issue from the gateway, and to wave them kindly farewells as they drove down the town and gained the dusty high road.

Isabel was in high spirits ; and Carrell, in spite of his weariness, felt with her the excitement of the journey. She talked of home, of the time it would take to reach their journey's end, and of the debt of gratitude which she owed him for his protection. Then she talked over again the perils of that first night at sea, and of her dream, and the strange faith it had

inspired in them both ; but to Carrell's mind all that they had passed through seemed now like a dream, in which terror and delight were strangely mingled.

When the road ascended a steep hill, they got down and walked to ease the horses ; but more for the pleasure of outstripping them, for they were impatient to be still further and further on their way. And yet the time appeared to pass quickly, and when the driver told them that they had performed nearly half their journey, it seemed but just before that they had started from the inn.

‘We shall get to Claytersville, perhaps, before it is quite dark,’ said Carrell. ‘How fast we have travelled !’

They left the coast-line far behind them, and passed through Ipswich, where the driver stopped for a few minutes at an inn on the Cornhill to rub his horses down and give them hay and water. A few idlers hung about to observe them ; Carrell leant back in the carriage, with his old habit of avoiding the gaze of strangers. He had almost forgotten this habit since the day that Isabel had spoken to him at Stedman's cottage. His movement was involuntary, but it sufficed to cast a cloud upon his spirits which henceforth hung over him in

spite of himself, as the horses rattled along the highway, leaving the miles behind.

A few miles from Ipswich they left the main road and took a bye-way to the left, which brought them near to the coast again, and the sea was now visible for the greater part of their journey. There were but few villages this way, and the grass which grew on the sides of the carriage-way bespoke the small traffic that existed in that remote region.

‘Can we see Claytersville?’ Isabel asked, as the road gained a high level, parallel with the line of the cliff.

‘Not yet,’ replied Carrell, who had been calculating the distance, and noting the speed of the horses. ‘We have to travel yet two hours.’

Isabel sighed, but soon recovered her vivacity. She was astonished at her own spirits as she talked over again her anticipations of a joyful reception.

‘Why, Ishmael,’ she said, ‘these adventures will make us famous in Claytersville. And think what glory awaits *you* there! I am sure my papa’s gratitude will be boundless; and Captain Clayter, how he will thank you; and what a hero you will be!’

## CHAPTER XV.

## FAREWELL.

ISABEL FRERE little suspected the change which had been wrought in her companion's mind by her last words. He had never yet fairly looked in the face the question of how he was to return to Claytersville and meet the curiosity which would be sure to be awakened by the story of their escape. Hitherto he had lived there in such retirement, that scarcely any but the Stedmans, Mrs. Clayter, and Isabel were aware of his existence. It would be impossible now that he could conceal himself there longer. Frere and the captain would inevitably enquire about him—would perhaps hear the circumstances of his first acquaintance with the Stedmans; the facts would become public, attention would be directed to him, and it would not be long before some echo of these things reached the ears of his persecutors. For there could be no doubt that the desperate character of his escapes, the conflict with the excavators, his long flight through the fields, and his subsequent mys-

terious disappearance from the neighbourhood, had caused much gossip in the country. It wanted but the story of the picking up of a man in the river exhausted with swimming on that night, to furnish a clue to the mystery, and the officers, who were vigilant and devoted to this service, would be quickly on his traces again.

To be discovered would be death, for his resolution never to be taken alive was strong within him. But now there was added another motive. Come what might, he made up his mind that Isabel Frere could never be to him more than a vision of delight, which had visited his eyes only to vanish again. And yet how could he bear the thought of her knowing of his disgrace, perhaps hearing the story of his offences from the lips of his enemies, and without those palliations of which he only could tell the tale?

Ponder on it how he would, there seemed no refuge save in flight. He could never return with her to that place in which he had found so kindly a shelter: Even till that moment, so steeped had he been in the infatuation of her presence that he had looked forward to their arrival almost as eagerly as she had. Now his misfortunes dawned upon him in a twofold

aspect. For awhile, at least, the friends who had rescued him from death, and given him succour in the extreme moment of his misery and peril, could protect him no more. Whither he should next turn his footsteps he knew not ; but one thing was certain—it would be necessary to bid Isabel farewell that very night. Before two hours more had passed, he must part with her for ever, to resume his old life of misery, and to fulfil that evil destiny which seemed to have marked him out for a fugitive and an outcast.

The thought was bitter, but his resolve was taken. It would be easy, he reflected, to leave her some time before the carriage reached Claytersville. He would make some excuse ; would hide his misery from her eyes as well as he could ; would part with her suddenly at some point where they stopped ; would quit the road, and make his way inland towards some unfrequented spot ; would hurry on till the sound of the carriage-wheels could ring in his ears no longer. What mattered it whither he went, so that he fled and got far away from there ?

He had spoken to his companion vaguely of a necessity for leaving her before their arrival in the town. He dared not trust himself to



speaking further then. A whirl of thoughts and feelings passed through his mind; some wild, and engendered only by the excitement and fatigue that he had undergone—others too real to be driven aside by any effort. Among them, one idea returned upon him continually, driving him to a deeper despair. All the sophistry with which he had deceived his own conscience for so long, became too weak to blind him now. As the carriage sped on along the highway, and the moment of parting became imminent, the truth forced itself upon him. He had loved her.

The miseries which surely awaited him in the future, would be greater than any he had ever known before. For this folly would cling to him; the recollection of the time that he had passed with her would be always at hand to make his path darker, and his burden heavier to bear. They only are truly wretched who have known what it is to taste the happiness which he had tasted, while protecting her through the perils which had so strangely brought them together.

Sometimes, as her face subsided into the old expression of thoughtfulness, it seemed to him that she guessed his misery, and regarded him with a kind of pity. But no. How could she

imagine a madness equal to his? Mrs. Stedman had told him that Isabel had a lover, to whom she was about to be married. But if she had not, it was little likely that the thought of his regarding her with a foolish passion would have entered her mind. She had been kind to him, considerate, grateful, and talked to him frankly; but the memory of her very frankness now tortured him. Even the recollection of that wild embrace in the moment of their release from the terrors of that night on the sea, and of her newly-awakened hope for the safety of their companions, now added to his tortures. It was, like that kiss with which men have embraced in the moment of a reprieve from some dreadful death, a token only of gratitude to heaven. It had been to him both a terror and delight; but it was too pure and passionless to have been mistaken. And was not the openness with which she had met his gaze since then, as well as the ease and freedom with which she had conversed with him afterwards, a proof of how little she had associated it with such a folly as his?

The time of sunset was approaching, another hour had passed; but they were still eight miles from Claytersville. He had put off the

moment of parting until now, with a weakness which he was ashamed to own to himself; but his reluctance now changed into an eagerness to be gone from her sight, and to break with the past, which gave him no rest until their carriage stopped. The horses were weary and overtaken. They must stop half an hour, the driver said, while he gave them corn, and rubbed them down again.

Isabel's feverish anxiety to come to the end of their journey suggested to her that they could walk on until the vehicle overtook them. As on the occasions when she got down and walked in going up hills, it was a relief to her to be still progressing in the direction of Claytersville, although no time was gained by it. It seemed as if her conscience must reproach her if she lingered even for that brief space on the road, while friends at Claytersville were distressed at her absence.

He walked beside her, and they soon left the little village behind. She had observed that he had become silent and reserved, and had ceased to talk to him, thinking that he was too weary to take interest in her remarks. In a little while they came to a turn in the road, which foot-passengers had avoided by a path across a meadow to a churchyard, which

led into the road again. The pathway was in all parts in sight of the high road, and Isabel chose this route as being shorter.

The churchyard was approached through a white gate, by which they entered, and paused awhile to look back for any sign of the carriage approaching.

They could not see it, but in a little while the sound of its wheels was audible in the far distance. The tide of his life had turned.

‘It is here that I am compelled to leave you, Miss Frere,’ he said, with an effort to be calm. ‘The carriage will convey you safely to your destination.’ His voice faltered as he added the words, ‘Good-night.’

The lightness of her tone smote him deeply as she answered—

‘Why, this is downright treason. Every one will ask for you at Claytersville. Shall the hero of our adventures be missing? Come, now, the carriage can bring you back here on its way; I cannot part with a brave protector so easily.’

A flood of passion almost choked his utterance; but his pride compelled him to speak, lest his hesitation should betray his folly.

‘It is impossible,’ he said. ‘There are reasons why I cannot go back to the town. When I tell

you they are painful to me, but that they are peremptory, you will not, perhaps, think me insensible to your kindness in refusing to go there now.'

'But you will return?'

He hesitated a moment; but his heart was too full to coin excuses. 'I am obliged to leave this neighbourhood,' he said; 'whether to return I do not know; but for the present it is certain that I cannot remain here. I have but one favour to ask of you.'

'What is that?'

'It is that you will kindly see Stedman, and beg him to tell no one of the circumstances of my first meeting with him. He is faithful, and his word will be enough. For yourself, I am sure you will make excuses for my absence. I wish to be forgotten there.'

'I will do what you desire,' said Isabel, who was more than ever astonished at this change in his tone and manner. 'The carriage is just here. Farewell, and believe me grateful for your services.'

She held her hand out, and Carrell took it trembling. Not till then had Isabel divined his secret. But she knew it now. Her woman's instinct felt it in his touch; in the trembling of his hand; in the wildness of his eyes; in

his whole attitude and bearing towards her. Her face flushed ; she drew herself up involuntarily ; her hand relaxed, and she turned cold.

‘ Good-night, Ishmael,’ she said, with a trace of that dignity which had wounded him in their first meetings.

Carrell saw her mount the carriage, and bowed to her as it rolled away, and was soon lost in the gathering gloom.

The coldness of that farewell haunted him for many a day. He walked into the churchyard for awhile to rest, thinking to go forward that night ; but the reaction of his excitement and long watchfulness had set in. For two nights and three days of exposure and fatigue he had known no rest. A stupor, heavy as death, descended on him, and he sank in the high grass and slept.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE MAN AT THE GATE.

As the carriage rolled on in the dusk of evening, Isabel Frere recalled to mind, one by one, all the circumstances of her acquaintance with Carrell. She knew now that he was in love with her, and that this was the cause of his embarrassment, his strange excuses, and his sudden determination to fly as they were approaching the end of their journey.

Her pride was touched, but her vexation was more with herself than with him. In truth she had treated him, as Carrell knew well, with a familiarity which she would not have ventured upon with one whom she could have regarded as a possible lover. In the frenzied joy of her release from the horrors of that night she had even permitted him to embrace her, and had actually returned his embrace. What wonder if he looked upon her as a flirt, who delighted to inveigle in her snares one below her in station, for the sake of the pleasure of crushing him afterwards with a word or a glance? There

were women of this stamp. Did Ishmael, she thought, take her for one of these?

Then she regretted at least the coldness with which she had parted with him; for he had behaved with a dignity and self-restraint which were deserving of something better. He was a poor man, but he was certainly a proud one. His manner had always been respectful, his patience and kindness unbounded. He had protected her amidst the perils on the sea. At least she owed him gratitude, but she had shown him none. And now he was even driven from his home on her account. 'I have been thoughtless, cruel,' she reflected; 'how he must hate me now.'

It was growing dusk, and she felt chilled and lonely. By-and-by a tear stole down her cheek. She had no reproaches left for him now, but abundance for herself. 'And yet,' she thought at times, 'how could he think that I encouraged his love? He must be mad.' But there was no consolation to be found in this thought. Love is involuntary, and is never in itself presumptuous. If he had taken one of the many opportunities which she had given him of declaring his passion for her she might have been angry with him. But he had betrayed it unconsciously by voice and manner, and had



shown, by his determination to bid her farewell then and there, how little he expected from her in return. Could he have done more? His tact and delicacy made her conduct still more hateful in her own eyes. 'He has the appearance of a seaman,' she thought, 'but he has had a gentleman's training. He had too much self-respect to make love to one whom the world regards as an heiress. A rebuff would have wounded him more deeply than some men. I have not known him long, and yet I seem to be sure of that.'

But it was idle now to regret the past, and she determined to endeavour to think of it no more. When she had arrived in Claytersville, and the first moments of that joyful meeting with her father and Mrs. Clayter were over, she made excuses for his absence as she had promised Carrell to do. She said that he had accompanied her till he had seen her safe nearly to the end of her destination, and had then left her, having business which compelled him to leave Claytersville for awhile. Frere, now his daughter was restored to him, was not much interested in the question of the cause of Carrell's absence; but he came to his own conclusion on the subject.

‘The poor fellow,’ he remarked privately to Captain Clayter, ‘did his best, no doubt; but the fact is, he made such a kettle of fish of that voyage after the storm, that he will not venture to face us.’

‘Exactly,’ replied the captain; ‘he’ll find his way back, no doubt, when the affair has blown over.’

As for Isabel, she encouraged no thought of her friend and protector which was not to his advantage. She had tried to forget her acquaintance with him in the preparations which they were making to depart; but it was in vain. If she could but have been assured that he did not look upon her as a heartless flirt, she thought she might have banished these things from her mind. And yet he was to her now only a name. What mattered it how a stranger, whom she would probably see no more, should regard her?

She ceased to walk by the sea-shore now; but she visited the Stedmans at their cottage, and heard from the old man a fuller narrative of his escape upon the sands than she could obtain from Mrs. Clayter, who had but a confused recollection of that terrible night. Clayter’s gratitude to his faithful old servant was unbounded. The captain promised him sincerely

enough to make him a handsome recompense as soon as the property began to improve.

‘But,’ said Stedman, ‘I only saved my own life, and while I was about it, just saved the lady’s too. As to recompense, I don’t ask for anythin’, unless the captain would oblige me by turning wise, and not goin’ to ruin headlong, as he’s doin’.’

Isabel conveyed to Stedman Carrell’s message, and the old man promised to observe it faithfully.

‘I liked the lad,’ said Stedman, ‘and am sorry he has thought fit to part with us; but here’s a home for him when he chooses to come back.’

It happened that on the morning before the day fixed for the departure of the visitors at the Royal Hotel, the Stedmans received a hurried note from Carrell without address, saying that he intended to return to them on the following evening, and hoped that would be in time to accompany them to London in the barge. The note was signed Ishmael, the only name by which the Stedmans had ever known him. Mrs. Stedman, being of a communicative nature, told Isabel of the contents of the note. Isabel was glad to think that Carrell was about to return, but the time that he had fixed confirmed her

belief that she only was the cause of his absence. News being scarce at Claytersville, the preparations for leaving were now the common talk of the neighbourhood. Carrell had doubtless heard of this in some way, and waited only for their going to come to Claytersville again.

If he had hired Mrs. Stedman to speak well of him in his absence, and to insinuate into Isabel's mind all the favourable things that could be said of him, she could hardly have performed that duty more effectually than she did. His conduct in saving the hatchboat, which Stedman had since fetched from Barwell, and which now lay battered and forlorn in the little creek, was the constant theme of her praise. Isabel listened to her, not unwillingly, but she was glad that the time had come for her to leave the town.

On the evening before their departure she visited Mrs. Stedman, to take leave of her, and make her some presents in token of their visit and its strange adventures. She was anxious still to hear about Carrell, and ventured to ask if there was any news of him.

'I wish you to convey my farewells to him,' she said, with a slight embarrassment. 'Tell him, please, that I shall remember his kindness, and all that I owe to him. Please say, too, that

I have never been ungrateful to him—though, perhaps, I have given him reason to think I was.’ She paused a moment, and then said, ‘That is all.’

Mrs. Stedman promised to remember her words. ‘But as to Ishmael thinking you ungrateful,’ she said, ‘he is too much of a gentleman, miss, to fancy such a thing. Listen, and I will tell you a great secret. I was not to tell it to any one; but then it will not matter if I tell you. You are going far away from here, and it can be no harm, I am sure.’

Isabel trembled slightly. She was not quite sure whether it was right to hear her; but her curiosity prevailed.

‘Is it about Ishmael?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ replied the bargeman’s wife. ‘Come here, please.’

They walked into the garden out of hearing of the bargeman, and paced to and fro on the gravel path. The blackbird in his wicker cage beside the door was roosting early, the evening was beautiful, and the garden, refreshed by the recent rains, was full of the scent of flowers. Before them stood the hatchboat, with its shattered mast, and broken cordage, and rent sail—a memento of those days and nights with Ishmael on the sea.

‘The secret is this,’ said the dame, in a whisper. ‘You must know that our friend Ishmael is no sailor or boat-builder, but a gentleman as proud as any in the land.’

‘Why does he live here, then, in disguise?’ asked Isabel, who felt a strange craving to hear more.

‘Hush!’ whispered the dame. ‘That is a mystery; but I have my ideas.’

Then she poured into Isabel’s ear all the story of their first finding him, drowning and exhausted, far out in the broad river at night; and told how he had given them only the name of Ishmael; ‘which means,’ she said, ‘one who is unhappy, persecuted, a dweller in the wilderness—like Ishmael in the Bible you know, miss.’

Isabel answered eagerly—

‘Yes, I know; but what is his true name?’

‘We do not know,’ replied the dame; ‘but cannot any one see that Ishmael is not a poor workman? He is a scholar, and knows foreign tongues. You remember that book of yours which he found?’

Isabel answered nervously—

‘Yes.’

‘Well, miss, he sat reading it at night, for my master went into his room, and found him sitting up late with it, and his lamp burning.

But I could have known, without all this, that Ishmael was a gentleman. He is so kind and thoughtful, and thinks so much of any little service done him. Though when we found him he seemed wretched enough, to be sure. His clothing was rough and old, and he looked like a wild man who had lived in the woods. No wonder he tried to drown himself at last. He had cause.'

'What cause?' asked Isabel, who was too much interested in the story of his life to interrupt her save with a question.

'You, miss, who are young and beautiful,' returned the dame, 'might guess, I think. When did a noble-looking young gentleman like that lose heart, and run away from friends and home, and give up the battle of life, for anything but love of some young lady? But he's growing wiser now, and is ashamed to have it known, as you see, and is going home to be a man again, and forget the creature who couldn't see that he was a fine young fellow—ay, and a good one to boot.'

Isabel felt a sensation of mingled shame and curiosity. Had she, then, wholly mistaken the cause of his emotion, and of his sudden flight? Her pride would not allow her to believe that. She thought it still a matter of indifference to

her whether Carrell had loved some one or not; but it is woman's nature to be inconsistent, and she could not rest without hearing more. She clutched the arm of her companion almost roughly, and asked in a voice that was slightly broken—

‘Did Ishmael tell you this?’

‘What need to tell me?’ asked the dame evasively. ‘Have I lived so long not to know the ways of you young folks?’

Isabel felt relieved. On her way back to the hotel she reflected on the strange story of which the bargeman's wife had made her the confidante, but determined to accept only such part of it as it pleased her to believe. Wounded vanity would not permit her to think that she had been mistaken in the cause of Ishmael's strange parting with her in the churchyard. That he was a man superior to those with whom she found him associated, she had already perceived. In their brief conversation in the hatchboat he had himself told her something of his history, and she knew that Mrs. Stedman had guessed rightly that he had been educated in happier circumstances, and that he had run away, when young, from friends and home. But what could have been the cause of that strange condition in which he had been rescued by the



Stedmans? Not love certainly. The idea was preposterous; it was manifestly the mere fancy of the bargeman's wife. To this view she held firmly, and she felt certain that it was not by his own fault or misconduct that he was reduced to seek concealment in that disguise. He was sensitive and proud, and though he had described himself as having been a wild lad, but not wholly bad, and even added, 'at least, not then,' she found it impossible to associate with him any solution which would be disgraceful to his name. 'I will do him this justice,' she thought, 'for I found him frank, and brave, and high-spirited; though,' she added, by way of parenthesis, 'foolish in one thing.'

This mystery about Ishmael invested him with a new interest, and served to keep him in her mind that night. She was restless, and could not sleep. About midnight she arose and closed her window, though the night was sultry, for she was weary of listening to the murmur of the sea. 'It was music to me once,' she thought; 'but not now. I must forget that night of terror before I can like the sea again.' Then she fell asleep, and dreamed of Ishmael drowning, and the dog barking aboard the barge.

The party at the hotel left Claytersville on the morrow in the same style of magnificence in which they had arrived. It was daylight this time, and the open carriage was handsome, the horses spirited, the postillion radiant in blue jacket and white cords. Such a crowd as the scanty population of Captain Clayter's unfortunate town could furnish was assembled in the street to see the ladies take their places in the vehicle. Mrs. Clayter had recovered from her fatigues and terrors, and looked ruddy again; but Isabel was paler than usual. The captain followed, Frere gave the word 'Borley' to the postillion, with instructions to post through Rayleigh, and leave the captain and his wife at the Beeches, and the carriage started at a gallop through the town and along the highway.

Isabel looked back now and then, and took a glance at the windowless terrace on the hill, and the flagstaff in the Royal Gardens, from which some one was already lowering the colours in token of the departure of those distinguished visitors. Then the trees and the hill-side concealed the place from her gaze, and they rattled on through a country where the glories of postillion and horses were wasted, for there were few eyes to see.

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It is doubtful, indeed, if any eye beheld them until they came to a turn in the road about two miles from the town. Here a man, in the rough garb of a sailor, crept along the side of a hedge in a field beside the roadway, and, crouching, watched them. Emboldened when they had passed, he stole out of his lurking-place, and came to a gate, on which he leaned to observe them from a distance.

Another bend in the roadway turned the faces of the ladies in the carriage unexpectedly towards him, and he could distinguish, even from that distance, the face of Isabel Frere. Isabel saw him too, in spite of his caution, and, by sure instinct, recognised him before the horses swept round in a cloud of dust, and the carriage disappeared.

‘So now,’ muttered the man, ‘farewell all dreams, while I fight my way out of this degradation to a better life.’

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE HONOURABLE MRS. CAREW.

LADY visitors were rare at the Cavalry barracks at Borley ; Colonel Carew, being a bachelor, had sent for his mother, the Honourable Mrs. Carew, to preside over his household on the occasion of Frere's visit, and this lady had taken up her abode at his quarters a fortnight before the party left Claytersville. Frere had excused himself for some time on the ground of business ; and finally the affair of the hatchboat had furnished another reason for delay.

Though the business which the Honourable Mrs. Carew had come to Borley expressly to perform was thus from time to time postponed, that lady was not idle. Her mind, in fact, was occupied incessantly with the question of why Frere was coming thither, and particularly why his daughter should accompany him ? Young ladies, she reflected, even when accompanied by their fathers, do not generally pay visits to officers' quarters.

Frere, as she had often heard her son remark,

was not a desirable companion. Indeed, she had heard him say that nothing but the necessity of holding a candle to a famous personage, prevented his indulging in the pleasure of kicking him down stairs. She knew well that they had business transactions together; but these were generally disposed of by a call on the lawyer in London. Now, thought this honourable lady again and again, 'Why should Mr. Frere come here on a state visit? and why should this young person be included in the invitation?'

If Frere's arrival had not been delayed for a considerable time, it is probable that these speculations would have died out for want of data; but the Honourable Mrs. Carew had leisure to think, and was moreover very curious and suspicious in matters of this kind. She had time, indeed, to do more than think—she was able to make enquiries in a way which her son never suspected, and to endeavour by various means to fathom the mystery which perplexed her.

She sounded first the housekeeper and servants, who little thought that any attempt had been made to extract information from them. For this lady's manners towards servants and dependants were sweet and winning. The fact

was, that such people were too far beneath her to be the objects of that haughty bearing which she had always at command in dealing with inferiors less removed in station from herself. Accordingly, she was popular in the servants' hall. 'A perfect lady,' said the butler; 'A thorough good Christian,' said the old housekeeper; 'A mistress as it is a pleasure to serve,' said the honourable lady's own maid, who had been with her from a girl, and who must know her mistress's character if anybody did. These simple folks, if they had had any information to give, would hardly have withheld it from so kind a lady. But the Honourable Mrs. Carew was not long in perceiving that no fragment of gossip had reached them on the subject.

She might, to be sure, have asked her son directly; but she was far too wise a person to begin in that way. The colonel had at a very early period of his existence asserted his right to go to ruin without much regard to maternal anxieties. She knew well that her influence over him was little enough. If her suspicions were correct, he would certainly not be deterred from proceeding by any remonstrances from her. To show him any sign of curiosity in the matter would have been to throw up her last chance, for the colonel's next step would

assuredly be to get her out of the way as an obstacle to his plans. She preferred, as she had done before on such occasions, to be silent and watchful, to trust to her talents for diplomacy, and to wait her time. But her first step was to write to London, to a certain trusty agent of hers, by name Cousins, who rarely failed to be able to give her private information about her son's movements. This gentleman's handwriting being very well known to the colonel, his correspondent's instructions were to have his reply addressed by a clerk; but this was only an additional precaution. The honourable lady always had the overhauling of the letter-bag, which was fetched by an orderly from the nearest post-town every morning and evening. This arose from the fact that she was invariably down at breakfast some hours before her son; while it happened that the evening bag always arrived about the time when the ladies had retired from the dining-room, leaving the colonel drinking with his military friends.

Cousins lived in May Fair, and was a gentleman not unknown in the military profession. He was himself often addressed as 'captain' by intimate friends, for there was something in his figure and bearing very suggestive of the

barrack and the parade-ground. He boasted of standing six foot one in his stockings; was very broad-shouldered, and had an enormous pair of black whiskers, which at this period were only just slightly touched with grey. It was only when he spoke that he failed to inspire respect; for his voice was a childish treble, ludicrously out of keeping with his manly form. He affected close-buttoned frock-coats, with padded breasts, and other semi-military articles of attire. Out of May Fair, people who prided themselves on their detective abilities would observe him, and remark, 'Fine man; evidently in the army.' But in truth, Cousins' sole connection with the army lay in the fact that nearly all his business transactions were with military officers. He followed, in short, the peaceful profession of a bill-discounter; and enjoyed a special reputation for supplying the wants of officers in difficulties.

It happened that Frere and Cousins had once been rivals in a certain way. Frere, too, had business relations with the army. He had begun life, indeed, by cultivating this branch of business; by advertisements in the papers headed 'To Officers and Others,' and by circulars offering money on good security, addressed by aid of the Army List and the Court Guide,



and forwarded through the post to all parts of the United Kingdom. The business was not a pleasant one. Occasionally the circulars fell in the way of wild young gentlemen who had some sort of security to offer ; but more often it happened that they only provoked a letter from some testy old officer, who, having extravagant sons, had strong opinions on the subject of tempting reckless young gentlemen with offers of that kind. But this was long ago, when Frere was a struggling man, with little to lend but the money of clients, and little to gain from such transactions beyond bonuses and douceurs and his own bills of costs. He had gradually retired from this sort of business, and was now anxious to have it forgotten that he had ever practised it, though some traces of it still remained, among which was his connection with the commandant at Borley. In truth, there had always been a wide difference between the business which he cultivated in military circles and that for which Cousins was famous wherever a regiment or a company were quartered. Cousins, who had once been a tailor, but who had dropped tailoring as money-lending, which he had always combined with that business, became more lucrative, was what is known as a 'sixty per cent. man.' Now

sixty per cent., as every one is aware, indicates an absence of that substantial security which is looked for by capitalists of more moderate views. Accordingly Cousins dealt in post-obits, in accommodation bills, and drafts upon 'expectations' of all kinds. He was generally well-informed about the characters of his victims, their circumstances, position, hopes, and capabilities. He made of each a careful study, and prided himself on knowing how to make sixty per cent. often 'as safe as the bank.' Now and then, to be sure, he made a mistake, and lost money, which seriously reduced the average of his gains; but on the whole Cousins practised this branch of the money-lending art with considerable success. Frere, on the contrary, was, as a rule, shy of what is called personal security. He did not, it is true, look for the perfect safety of the Three per Cents.; nor did he always require the tangible guarantee of land or houses; that sort of thing requires no genius, and is consequently rewarded with mere plodder's gains. He liked mortgages, but did not object to take them on encumbered property, or from embarrassed men whose affairs were sufficiently involved to daunt more timid capitalists. He, too, occasionally made mistakes, but not so often as

Cousins. That, however, was to be expected. His practice, though undoubtedly of a speculative character, was a slower, but, on the whole, a safer one.

It will be seen from this that, although Frere and Cousins both lent money, and had both made the army a field of operations, there was little resemblance in their business, and no necessary antagonism between them; but such is the jealousy unhappily prevailing among professional men, that they hated each other with scarcely a shade of distinction on either side. Frere, who knew nothing of Cousins personally, and who resided in a quarter far distant from the aristocratic neighbourhood in which his rival found a convenient centre of operations, was nevertheless continually hearing from military clients stories of Cousins' proceedings; and Cousins, for like reasons, was kept pretty well informed on the subject of Frere. So it came to pass that these two professional brethren, instead of being thankful for that constitution of society which had provided abundant room for each to pursue his calling in peace, never lost an opportunity of denouncing one another. Frere, indeed, did not scruple to speak of the May Fair gentleman as a vampire; while his competitor, not to

be out-done in the matter of natural history, delighted to refer to the boa-constrictor as illustrating in a remarkable way that habit of winding himself around an unfortunate client, and squeezing the substance out of him, for which Frere was generally known.

In truth, however, this image of the boa-constrictor was not a good one. Anyway, Frere rarely squeezed so much out of a victim but that there was something left for his jealous brother. If envy and rivalry had not blinded Cousins, he would have perceived that, so far from there being an antagonism in Frere, the operations of the latter frequently prepared the way for the more desperate speculator. From Frere to Cousins was a well-known gradation in the descent to ruin. Captain Clayter himself was in a fair way to become one of the numerous military and semi-military names on Cousins' books. For, even when every vestige of property was gone, it was often observed with wonderment that the inventive spirit of Cousins was able to suggest a security good enough at least for his purpose. Some whispered that, on occasions and under circumstances known to himself, he did not object to discount forged acceptances; holding them *in terrorem* over the head of the negotiator, and driving him

to superhuman efforts to raise the wind in order to meet them and so escape disgrace ; though of this there was no evidence. But it was certain that people who could not find a rag of security even of the kind which would satisfy Frere, were nevertheless frequently enabled to obtain funds in May Fair.

So it happened that Colonel Carew, having found an increasing difficulty in getting assistance from Frere, had already had recourse to that more indulgent friend of the warrior in distress. All this, by the advice of Cousins, he had carefully concealed, not only from Frere, but, as he supposed, from everybody else. But there was one whom he little suspected to be informed on this subject, but who had nevertheless very complete information as to his visits to May Fair. This was the honourable lady whom he had called on to preside over his household at Borley. No one, in fact, knew better than Mrs. Carew how her son stood with the crafty Cousins.

As these things had an important influence on the destinies of the chief personages in this story, it is worth while to enter into them a little more deeply, and particularly to explain how it came to pass that Cousins of May Fair

was an agent and a spy in the service of the Honourable Mrs. Carew.

Nearly twelve months before the period of Frere's visit to Borley—which was about the time when the colonel, acting on the suggestion of a sympathetic brother officer, had first applied to Cousins for aid—the Honourable Mrs. Carew had found herself one evening, at a dinner-party, in close proximity to young Lord Skelterdale, the fortunate heir to the earldom and estates of Sommerton. This young nobleman, whose escapades subsequently rendered him so notorious, was at this time chiefly known in aristocratic circles for qualities which are summed up in the adjective, soft. He parted his thin fair hair down the middle, had a lisp, wore an eye-glass in his right eye, as it was believed, both day and night, and exhibited, in short, all the customary signs of youthful imbecility in high life. Lord Skelterdale, on this occasion, paid so much attention to his fair but middle-aged neighbour, not only at the dinner-table, but afterwards when the gentlemen ascended to the drawing-room, that some young ladies present tittered behind drawing-room table books, and mammas looked stern, and wondered whether the idiot was going to be inveigled into matrimony by a woman old

enough to be his grandmother. But the Honourable Mrs. Carew, although she was not exactly old enough to be his grandmother, contemplated the case in a very different light. She was scarcely fifty—in fact, was thoroughly well preserved, as men say, had still a fresh complexion, a skin without a wrinkle, perfectly white teeth, and a head of hair which, though strongly dashed with grey, was always curled or dressed according to the last vagary of Parisian fashion. Moreover, her manners were pleasing, her voice musical, her conversation that of a well-bred woman of the world; her dress chosen with admirable taste, but with just a confession of middle age in it—for her judgment was too good to ape the attire of young girls. ‘My hair,’ she would say to her maid, ‘may be in the fashion; its streaks of silver excuse me; but for my dress, let me be a little behind my time.’ A lady with so much good sense was not likely, in spite of these attractions, to make mistakes in the matter of young Lord Skelterdale’s persevering attentions. ‘He is certainly not silly enough,’ she thought, ‘to fall in love with a widow of fifty.’ So while his lordship was ogling and complimenting her in his awkward fashion, and young ladies were tittering, and mammas looking grave, the Honourable Mrs.

Carew's mind was simply running on the question of what this very foolish young man wanted from her.

The clue was furnished at last. The young nobleman was just then in need of information; and that information concerned her son, Colonel Carew. 'There cannot be a doubt about it,' thought the honourable lady. Like a foolish fellow as he was, he had put off the real business of his talk till he was afraid that the evening would slip by without coming to the point; and then plumped it out with a sheepish sort of embarrassment which at once told this experienced lady that his motive was something more than idle curiosity. His first question concerned an aunt of the colonel's, who had long lived in Italy. 'Is it true,' asked his lordship, 'that this old lady is so fond of the colonel, that they fear she will die if he does not go over? You know,' he added, 'I only repeat what people say.' Then he dropped his eye-glass with a jerk, clutched it and placed it in his eye again, and added, 'Of course, I'm not curious, you know; but lucky thing for the colonel that she's so wealthy.'

Mrs. Carew smiled sweetly, and with delightful unreserve communicated to her questioner



all she knew on the subject. He was emboldened, and ventured on kindred topics ; on all which she conversed with the same easy frankness. The young lord was delighted with his success. Meanwhile, the lady, when a little embarrassment caused his lordship to drop his gaze, seized the opportunity of scrutinising his unimpressive features for some explanation of the mystery. 'I have met with odd things before now,' she thought ; 'but who on earth could have set this brainless young man to pump me?' But her questioner remarked nothing in her features except the blandest smiles ; and she had really been wonderfully simple and confiding. She seemed, indeed, to have a hearty relish for the business, for when she was about to leave that evening, she entreated her young friend to call upon her on the morrow. 'I see,' she said, 'you are interested in Charles, and will like to hear some further news of his prospects. We cannot talk of them here ; come to me—after three ; Seventeen, Curzon Street—you know.' And so she parted with this young nobleman, whose 'leaving-books' from Eton were scarcely three years old ; and the young ladies who had observed the parting tittered faster, and the mothers frowned harder than ever on that designing woman.

The morrow came, and with it came the young Viscount, whose cabriolet stood at the door of Number Seventeen Curzon Street until Tom, his lordship's tiger, holding the head of his magnificent foaming horse, wondered what new attraction could have fallen in his master's way. When the young nobleman came out again, he looked flushed and troubled.

'Drive to Cousins', Tom, he said; but before stepping into the vehicle he had changed his mind. 'No,' said he, 'drive home. I feel devilish queer to-day.'

The scene that had taken place in the Honourable Mrs. Carew's drawing-room may be briefly described. He had found the lady still blandly smiling, reclining on a settee in an easy attitude.

'Now about Charles,' she said. 'Take a seat, pray.'

Her visitor placed his hat on a side table, fixed his eye-glass firmly, and took his seat beside her. The frowning mothers, if they could have witnessed the scene up to this point, would have been more than ever convinced of their own sagacity.

'You want to know about my poor boy's prospects?' continued the lady, who since the

night before had bestowed much meditation on the matter.

‘Well, you know, upon my word I’m not curious,’ replied her visitor; ‘but I’m glad to hear good news, of course.’

‘Oh, fie!’ exclaimed the lady; ‘not curious? Will you force me to say that is a fib? Come, now, own that you *are* curious, and that it was no other than that scoundrel Cousins, the money-lending man, who set you to enquire.’

The young gentleman turned red, then pale, then red again.

‘Upon my honour,’ he stammered, ‘Cousins never told me to ask you anything. Upon my life he didn’t.’

‘No,’ replied the lady, whose bland smiles had vanished, and were succeeded by an expression of features which made her young visitor still less at his ease. ‘Cousins never sent you to me, I am sure. I know his system. It is to set one victim against another—to get a poor wretch in his toils, and then make him play the spy. Information in family matters is the article he trades in, but he doesn’t send to mothers for it. That comes from the over-zeal of a blind tool. Cousins is a crafty rogue, but he makes blunders sometimes. He never made a greater than when he set a foolish young nobleman to

ask about my son, and forgot to caution him to avoid me.'

'Upon my word, madam,' stammered his lordship, rising from his seat, 'you presume on the respect which I am bound to pay to your sex.'

He was going to add the words, 'and age,' but there was something in her voice and manner which awed him ; and he shrank from irritating her further. 'I am very sorry if I have offended you,' he faltered, as he put his hand out to take his hat. But the lady had observed the movement. She rose, and seizing that article of attire before he could reach it, placed it on a chair behind her, and said—

'Not yet, please ; our business is not done. Sit down.'

Her visitor obeyed with a faint smile. He was beginning now to be anxious on his own account, and to be very curious to learn what were the lady's tactics.

'Now,' she continued, 'I am going to talk to you calmly. You forget, perhaps, that Cousins is a neighbour of mine. We are both May Fair people, you know, which gives me opportunities of observing things.'

Her visitor bowed.

'In fact,' she went on, 'I often drive past

man's affairs. Still she made no allusion to 'that other matter,' but this might be merely the game of a dextrous player, who kept her best card for the last.

Cousins' mind was made up. His policy was to be open and straightforward. The Honourable Mrs. Carew must be made a friend at any cost.

'How you obtained this information, madam,' he said in his squeaking tones, 'is of little consequence; it would be idle to dispute its correctness. I presume you have some object. May I ask what I shall have the honour of doing for you?'

'My son,' answered the lady, 'has written to you lately?'

'He has.'

'He wants money?'

'Yes.'

'On what terms?'

'No terms have been mentioned, I assure you: but you will understand that as he has really no security to offer—almost an affair of honour between us, as it were—I cannot afford to do business without some temptation.'

'Mr. Cousins,' said the lady, 'I will be frank with you. My son has spoken of expectations. He has none, except from the death of Lord

Carew, who may marry again, and defeat his hopes. His lordship is now but just sixty, and is a man with a frame of iron.'

Cousins made a gesture as if about to speak ; but the lady stopped him.

'I know,' she said, 'he has talked about an aunt in Italy, and her will. A delusion. The old lady has not a shilling but what she has saved out of a life income.'

'If this be so,' said Cousins, 'I cannot be too grateful to you.'

'There is no ground for gratitude on either side, Mr. Cousins,' said the lady. 'You see I have power to interfere with your arrangements with that brainless young nobleman, but I have really no intention of doing so. It is positively no affair of mine. But, on the other hand, I expect you to assist me.'

'Go on, madam, pray,' replied Cousins.

'You must lend no money to my son, except what I approve.'

Cousins nodded. 'Why should I?' he thought. 'There is evidently not much to be gained in that quarter.'

'You must keep me informed of my son's movements,' she added ; 'apprise me of all applications which he may make to you : and lend him only such money as I may be able to

place in your hands for that purpose. As to the terms, you will wring from him as my agent what you can, and place to my account both your gains and your losses.'

A treaty was soon completed on this basis between the Honourable Mrs. Carew on the one hand, and Mr. Cousins on the other. Cousins rather admired her diplomatic arts ; and as he had nothing to lose and much to gain by serving her, really performed his part of the agreement with fidelity and even zeal. Thus the colonel got occasional assistance from May Fair, little imagining that the lady was investing her secret savings in this eccentric way, or that the interest which he paid was carried to the credit of his own mother, who consoled herself with the reflection that, sooner or later, the money would find its way back to her spendthrift son.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## AT BORLEY.

THIS was the lady who had set her wits to work to solve the problem of why Frere was coming to Borley, and why Isabel was with him. It must be evident, from this sketch of her character and connections, that she was not unlikely to succeed in unravelling that mystery. But Cousins replied, honestly enough, that he knew nothing. The colonel had held no communication with him for some months. 'I must bide my time,' she thought. 'If this means a match with the daughter of that notorious old fellow, signs will not be wanting when the young person appears on the scene.'

She knew the desperate circumstances of the colonel, his pressing need of money, which would render a girl with a moderate fortune in his eyes a prize of greater value than the richest promise for the future. 'A year ago, to have saved his horses,' she reflected, 'he would have married a black woman; he is the same man he was



then. He cannot blind me with his talk of reform.'

Come what would, she had determined to frustrate such a scheme. The fact is, that just as Frere could speculate on the future in store for her son, so could she, and with better means of judging. She had little faith in her own arguments about the probability of Lord Carew's marrying or having a family; her allusion to his frame of iron was but a flight of fancy intended for the deception of Cousins. To her mind it was as certain as anything in human affairs could be, that her son would at no distant day be a peer with large estates, and a noble figure, and fitted, in spite of his youthful follies, to aspire to the hand of a lady of fortune in his own station. Rather than see him marry the daughter of a vulgar money-lender, whose name was a byword among the colonel's associates, she would have preferred to strip herself of all she possessed, or to see him bankrupt and beggared—compelled to fly the country, or what not. 'Such things,' she thought, 'may be got over; but a marriage of this sort, never.'

It was late in the afternoon of a glorious day that the post-chaise conveying Isabel and her father drew near to Borley. The barracks were

situated in the midst of wild heath, a vast extent of which was enclosed within its precincts. The great parade and the smaller squares, the stables, the exercise-ground, the gymnasium, and other buildings in connection with it, were entirely hidden from the sight of those who approached the officers' quarters by the road. These houses, indeed, turned their backs upon the barracks, with which they communicated only by a gate in a high wall at the end of gardens behind them. The front windows of the long, low-built white house which was the residence of the commandant, looked down upon an extensive lawn, which was dotted with standard roses, and separated from the roadway by a row of spreading oaks, and a ha-ha, crossed by a little bridge with a gate. The spot was beautiful, for beyond this the plain, with its clumps of brambles and rushy hollows, stretched far away, slowly descending to the south, towards a more cultivated country.

Isabel remarked the beauty of the scene as they approached, and the horses, slowly toiling up the sandy hill, gained a table-land, and wound away through an avenue of tall firs. Mrs. Carew had observed their approach from her window, and had descended into the garden, where she affected to be deeply engaged in training roses at

a distance. So it happened that the colonel received the visitors alone, and his mother watched the meeting unobserved.

‘You are late, Frere,’ said the colonel.

‘We had to leave Clayter and his wife at the Beeches,’ replied the lawyer.

The colonel bowed to Isabel, and assisted her to alight.

‘You will find this part of the country pleasant now, Miss Frere,’ he said, with a languid effort at gallantry. ‘I hope you may one day make a longer stay.’

This allusion was lost upon Isabel, who smiled sweetly, and said, ‘Thank you, it is beautiful, indeed.’

‘Surely there is no love-making here,’ thought Mrs. Carew, who now hastened into the house to make apologies for her neglect of her guests.

The days passed pleasantly enough with Isabel Frere at Borley. Mrs. Carew treated her with something more than maternal kindness, and the colonel did not trouble her with his attentions. Now and then she thought of Carrell, and wondered about his strange story; but if the truth must be told, she thought less about him every day. New scenes occupied her mind, and their

brief romance was rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

As for Mrs. Carew, the position of affairs became more and more perplexing. She had established an intimacy with her young friend, as she delighted to call her, which was promising in the highest degree ; but as yet Isabel had confided to her nothing. Was this artifice ? she wondered, or was there really nothing in their visit, after all ?

One day, as these twain were sitting together, the elder lady said to Isabel, with a very artistic air of simplicity and unconcern, ‘ My son is no longer a boy. I wish I could see him happily married. It would rid him at least of some of the wild companions of his earlier days.’ But Isabel exhibited no sort of embarrassment. She asked, indeed, whether he intended to marry, but it was with the air of one who took very little interest in the question.

‘ I do not know, dear,’ replied the old lady. ‘ Sons do not always communicate with their mammas on such subjects, nor do the young ladies whom they select always make confidantes in that quarter.’

Mrs. Carew looked hard at her companion, but she did not shrink. Isabel merely replied that there ought to be no secrets from a good

mother in such matters. The test was sufficient. Mrs. Carew was convinced that, whatever might be the objects of her father, Isabel Frere knew nothing of any scheme for marrying her to the colonel.

Then she watched her son at the dinner-table and in the drawing-room ; but she detected no sign of what she sought for. The fact was, that the colonel regarded the arrangement with the father as almost sufficient in itself ; and was so little inclined for love-making that he postponed even an approach to it until the time of their departure drew near.

One evening, after dinner, they walked upon the lawn, and the colonel, for the first time, offered Isabel his arm. Carew, though a handsome man, and much admired by the other sex, was more at home with horses than in the company of ladies ; but he felt it necessary to break the ice in some way. How to begin was the question which perplexed him ; but at length, seizing the opportunity of Isabel's praises of the country around, he pressed her hand, and said, as softly as he was able—

‘ Why should not this be your home ? ’

‘ My home ? ’ repeated Isabel, who did not understand his words.

‘Yes,’ he answered; ‘there is no occasion to disguise what I mean, Miss Frere. You have but to say the word to become my wife.’

Isabel’s face flushed, and she relaxed her hold upon his arm. There was something offensive in his voice and manner, which she felt instinctively.

‘Colonel Carew,’ she said, ‘this can only be a cruel insult. Until four days ago I had never seen you since I was a child. It is impossible that I can entertain any feeling towards you which could render this abruptness even tolerable. I beg you will let me return to the house.’

But the colonel was not to be daunted so easily. He was secretly sceptical about Isabel’s ignorance of the arrangement made with her father, and regarded the assurances of Frere on that score as mere ruses on his part for enhancing the value of the prize. ‘She plays her part well,’ he thought, as he tweaked his moustache for a moment; ‘but, woman-like, puts her refusal on a ground which can be removed. Short acquaintance is, at least, a plea which must get weaker every day.’

‘We soldiers are rough, Miss Frere, I know,’ he said as he seized her hand to detain her; ‘but we do not, perhaps, make the worse husbands. It is true, I have known you but a few

days ; but give me time to know you better, and meanwhile promise to think favourably of me. Come ; is that agreed ?'

'You cannot imagine, sir,' she replied, in a voice which no one but the colonel could have mistaken, 'how painful this conversation is to me. If you could, you would release my hand at once and allow me to return.'

The colonel was puzzled. He had a vague notion, derived chiefly from reminiscences of scenes on the stage, that he had arrived at a point at which a lover is expected to descend upon one knee and kiss the hand of a reluctant maiden with a show of fervour. It was horribly ridiculous, he reflected, but soon over. They were at some distance from the house, where they had left the party sitting in the verandah. It was growing dusk too ; and they found themselves in a little alley bordered by shrubs, which sheltered them from observation. The colonel hesitated ; but at that moment a figure appeared at the entrance to the path and stood confronting them. It was that of Mrs. Carew, who had sauntered out alone to enjoy the beauty of the evening.

The colonel saw her, though she sauntered back again towards the house, as if she had not remarked them. Her proximity disconcerted him.

‘We will go back now,’ he whispered to Isabel. ‘I will say no more, but speak to your father about this. He is your best friend.’

Isabel looked flushed and excited as she stepped into the verandah again. The long French windows, descending to the ground, were still open for the sake of the air ; but the party had retired into the drawing-room beyond, which was in a blaze of light. Isabel glanced at her father, who returned her looks with a cold stare of curiosity, relaxing into an expression of triumph, as he evidently remarked her confusion. There was something in his reception which chilled her to the heart, and she turned away. At that moment Mrs. Carew, who had remained in the garden until then, entered the verandah, and standing in the centre of one of the windows, looked full at Isabel. The latter had turned to her instinctively for support ; but her attitude repelled her, and for the first time the older lady regarded her with a look of haughty disdain, which compelled her to drop her gaze.

‘I cannot stay here,’ thought Isabel. ‘What have I done to deserve this persecution?’

She made a hurried excuse, and stole up to her room, where she sat long thinking over the events of that day, and listening anxiously for the sound of her father’s footsteps on the stairs.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE LETTER-BAG.

OWING to the approach of dusk and the shade of the trees in the alley in which Isabel and the colonel were walking, Mrs. Carew had but imperfectly noted what had passed between them. She had perceived that they had selected a retired spot—that they lingered there together, and that they were apparently in earnest conversation. That the colonel held his companion by the hand she was certain. What could that mean, she reflected, but love-making? And though they soon returned to the house, they had shown no sign of an intention to do so until startled by her sudden appearance. Isabel's troubled countenance, when they met soon afterwards in the light of the drawing-room, confirmed her suspicions. It was natural enough, in Mrs. Carew's eyes, that she should show embarrassment, when conscious of having been observed, particularly when the observer was the colonel's mother, before whom she had performed the part of simplicity and ignorance

with a skill which had deceived even the lady who had compelled Cousins of May Fair to acknowledge her superiority. 'Like father, like daughter,' she thought. 'Frere is, after all, a slyer fox than Cousins. Certainly this girl does credit to the breed.'

The discovery of Isabel's supposed perfidy boded ill for the success of the Honourable Mrs. Carew's plans. To work upon Isabel's mind had been, indeed, the only resource open to her. Frere's calculations she understood well. She knew that he had perceived, just as she had done, that her son's succession to his title was not so distant a thing as it seemed to others. The colonel's motives were equally clear to her. He was in these things the same desperate player that he had shown himself in those transactions on the turf which had brought him to this pass. The future, she reflected once more, was to him nothing as compared with the power to grasp at once the income of a comparatively well-dowered wife; not to speak of more immediate advantages with which the lawyer, if report were true, had it in his power to tempt him. Her last hope had been that Isabel might be only a passive agent in the plot, whose mind might, if necessary, be prejudiced against the match. But if she could display such craft as

her treachery supposed, it was evident that there was little hope in this direction. She must, in that case, have been well schooled against communicating anything to the mother of her intended husband, and she seemed to have executed her instructions with a tact which rendered her a match for manœuvres of this kind. 'It doubtless wants but a word,' thought Mrs. Carew, 'to turn this young lady's sweet simplicity into open defiance. Shall I speak that word?'

There seemed, indeed, to be no other course. It was possible that to attack Frere and his daughter openly might lead to a quarrel in which her son might become involved. But this necessitated a rupture with the colonel, who, after all, might request her, through his mother, to leave the house, and might patch up the affair to Frere's satisfaction. She was a clever woman; but the cleverest cannot work without tools. She missed here the fulcrum by which she had been able to turn the tables so dextrously on young Lord Skelterdale. 'Oh that I had this cunning scoundrel or his daughter in my power!' she thought. 'But what can one poor woman do against these rogues?'

She had retired from the drawing-room, for her son had returned to the verandah to smoke

there with Frere and some military friends, as was his custom in fine weather. As she ascended the stairs to her chamber, she remarked that there was a light in Miss Frere's room, for her door was not quite closed. 'She would prefer not to see me to-night, I dare say,' thought the older lady. 'Shall I disturb her? Perhaps. But not yet. I must think awhile.'

She listened, as Isabel had done, for the foot-step of Frere on the stairs. 'He is sure to seek an interview with his daughter to-night,' she thought, 'if only to know how the business progresses. I saw the look of triumph in his eyes when she entered from the garden.'

'Noblesse oblige' is a good motto; but this lady was not scrupulous in small matters, particularly when her faculties were aroused for some great object. She would gladly have played the eaves-dropper, if it could have given her a chance of picking up some crumb of useful information. But Mrs. Carew, as we have seen, was not always right in her anticipations. She listened for some time; but Miss Frere had evidently not left her room, and no one came. To be baffled thus was agony. Apart from her interest in her son's future, she had an intellectual pride which was revolted by the thought of her being outwitted by a girl. 'Plague upon

those fawning parasites,' she thought, as the sound of the voices of the colonel's military friends in the verandah ascended to her through the open window. 'I must return to pour tea for them before long, and to smile at their foolish talk, and hide my thoughts as best I can.' This latter reflection, in spite of her contempt for her guests, reminded her to go into her dressing-room, and re-arrange her hair. Her maid was below awaiting her summons; but the lady desired to dispense with her aid to-night. She wished to be alone.

This supplementary toilette completed, she paced to and fro in her chamber, finding some strange sort of relief for the mind in tearing paper, and crumpling the fragments and casting them on the ground. My lady's maid, Clara, when she ascended to her room that night, was surprised to find the floor strewn with these tokens of her mistress's anger. But the darker signs of her rage left no traces behind. Isabel had given her a small card portrait, which Mrs. Carew now took out of a book upon her dressing-table, and scrutinised it eagerly by the light of her lamp.

'What is there in that childish face that it could baffle me? Let her beware,' she murmured, as she dropped the portrait from her

grasp and sank into a chair with an expression of anger, all the more striking from the smoothness of her features. There was something in it tiger-like, as there was in the appearance of her hands as they dropped beside her with their long thin fingers contracted to the likeness of claws.

But she grew tired of this inaction. She was not in the habit of being long cast down like this, and she was a woman fertile in resources. She went down the stairs again, determining to go into the library and write to Cousins. Her first idea was to direct him to write to her son, and tell him that the world talked of his approaching marriage with a woman of fortune, and that creditors were preparing to take advantage of his good prospects and to press their claims. This might induce him to delay until he could come to some arrangement with them, and delay might break up the scheme. It was a poor chance, for it could hardly be supposed that either he or Frere had not anticipated this difficulty; but it was something. 'If that fails,' she thought, 'I may try a more desperate remedy. Cousins shall arrest him in his own name for my money. We will see then whether this flower of love will stand the close atmosphere of a debtor's gaol.'

Her features suddenly brightened at this diabolical idea. It had not occurred to her before. Such a course was not without serious objections. It would be damaging to her son's prospects, which she had at heart. It would remove him from his duties, compel him perhaps to sell his commission, and to give up all hope of advancement in the army. But it would be, after all, a magnificent coup-d'état. Cousins should even oppose his release from prison if necessary, on the ground of extravagance and false representations of his prospects. What if Cousins avowed his motive to be that hatred of Frere which was so notorious, and offered liberty only on the terms of his abandonment of this prospect of marriage with the daughter of his rival? The scheme seemed to improve as she reflected on it; for if Cousins could urge these motives after arresting him, why not before? Why not threaten his client with arrest if he lent himself to Frere's ambitious schemes? If convinced that Cousins was in earnest, the mere prospect of such a disaster might compel him to yield.

Then she remembered that in the excitement of these events she had forgotten to enquire for the evening letter-bag. She found it in the library on her son's bureau, where he generally examined letters before retiring for the night.

She had a key of the bag, which she singled out from the bunch at her side; then turning the lamplight on more strongly, she closed the room door, and sat down to her task.

The bag contained a packet for her addressed in a clerkly hand, which she seized eagerly. 'It is from Cousins,' she thought; but her eagerness subsided before she had broken the seal. 'After all, what can he tell me now,' she reflected, 'more than I have discovered for myself?'

The packet contained two letters, one a brief note from her faithful agent, directing her to read the enclosure, but to be cautious as to how she used it. The other was a long epistle addressed to Cousins, which changed in a few minutes the whole position of affairs.

The letter was in her son's handwriting, as she had seen at a glance. It was, as usual, an appeal for pecuniary assistance, and was dated only two days before. The colonel pleaded the great urgency of his needs, his reluctance to sell his yacht the Snowflake, which had besides, a lien on her that would leave him but little net. What he wanted was just three hundred pounds on a note of hand bearing his own name and the name of a brother officer. The bill, he proposed, was to be nominally at



three months, but really to be redeemed in two. 'I shall be flush of money then,' he added, 'and I will tell you why. But not a word of this, as you value your own interests. My bride knows nothing yet, though all is settled with the father, and perfectly in train.' The colonel continued in the following noble vein :—

'You must just behave like a good Samaritan, and help a fellow at a pinch like this. When I tell you that my fiancée is the daughter of old Frere, whom you know well enough, you will see I shall not put my money on an outsider this time. The thing is straightforward enough. Frere will come down with a handsome settlement and some ready cash, and I shall take his daughter, who will one day be Lady Carew. That is a fair bargain, but I know well enough that it is you fellows who will have most reason to rejoice. Your money will be safer any way, for Frere cannot press me now. So, my dear captain' (the colonel called his correspondent captain, as others did when in a wheedling mood), 'don't leave a comrade without a pound at this crisis in his destiny. Just think of what I am swallowing for your benefit. Fancy me about to marry old Frere's daughter, and connect myself with the unsavoury locality of Saint George's-in-the-East. The very sight of

her pale face has upset me more than anything since my Columbine lost the Shrewsbury by half a neck. But I am resigned. To-morrow I tell her the news. Then there will be a day or two of soft talk ; the pair will take their departure, and I shall be respited till the twenty-fifth of next month, the day fixed for the completion of this great human sacrifice.'

The Honourable Mrs. Carew refolded this romantic epistle and breathed again. 'Cousins has done his work well this time,' she thought. 'There is nothing like a clever rogue for a tool, when you have made it his interest to serve you.'

## CHAPTER XX.

## A CANDID ADVISER.

TIME was precious. Mrs. Carew could not absent herself much longer from the drawing-room. She was already expecting a summons from the housekeeper to preside at the tea-table, but it was of the utmost importance to see Isabel before the latter could have an opportunity of talking with her father. The honourable lady had little doubt that she had received her son's attentions favourably, that at least the colonel had made a beginning of his courtship; but it was some relief to know that up to that very night he had never spoken to her of love. He was even under the belief that Isabel knew nothing of the object of their visit. Such a fact was almost incredible; but on reflection, her own observation had confirmed it. What if, after all, the girl was as truthful as she seemed? In that case the letter which Mrs. Carew held in her hand was a powerful weapon. For what woman with an atom of spirit would consent to wed a man who, even while he made

love to her, could write to a vulgar money-lender about her in such scornful and derisive language? 'The colonel may have impressed her,' she thought. 'Young girls are silly, and after all, my boy' (although he was nearly thirty she always called him a boy in her moods of tenderness towards him) 'is handsome; and though not what is called a lady's man, is not perhaps the less captivating on that account: women love the man who does not court them over-much. And yet,' she reflected, 'she must be infatuated indeed if her love could resist such a revelation as this.'

But did she dare to show it her? There was the question. Cousins had warned her to be careful, and not without reason; though he knew well enough that she would be as anxious as he was to conceal from her son her knowledge of that letter. This was the dilemma in which she was placed. 'If I do not produce this proof of his contempt and want of affection for her, I may fail to convince her; if I do show it, she may go to him and reproach him, or may tell her father, which would be the same thing.' Then the secret of the mother's relations with Cousins would be out—a quarrel with her son, whom, after all, she loved better far than herself, would be inevitable; and there would be

an end for ever of her power of getting that important information from May Fair, which had more than once furnished matter for her scheming head, and helped her to save him from disgrace.

She weighed all these things, but did not hesitate long. Putting the letter in the pocket of her dress, and hastily re-locking the bag, she crept up again to Isabel's room and knocked at the door.

'Are you alone, dear, and can I come in?' she asked in her softest voice.

Isabel hastened to the door, and they were soon embracing.

'I so longed to speak with you,' said Isabel; 'but I thought you were angry.'

'I angry, dear?' asked the older lady, with an air of simple innocence. 'Angry with you, and for what?'

'It is nothing; I would rather not talk about it—at least, not with you,' replied Isabel, faltering. 'It is enough that I was mistaken—enough that the cause which I imagined was unfounded. I thought—I thought,' she continued with some embarrassment, 'that you misunderstood my conduct to-night. But I wish to say no more, now I know that you did not.'

Isabel placed a chair for her ; but she waved away the attention with her hand. 'Come here, child,' she said in her tender way, 'and tell me frankly. You have a secret, I think, which I have some claim to know. Have you not?'

She placed her arm around her companion's shoulders, and looking into her face with a pleasant smile, said—

'Now you hesitate. Shall I guess?'

'I have no selfish motive for secrecy, madam, believe me,' replied Isabel, 'but I know not what to say. Forgive me. It may pain you if I tell you.'

'Let me, then, save you the unpleasantness of speaking. You were walking in the garden alone with Colonel Carew this evening?'

'Yes.'

'And he made you an offer of marriage—or, at least, made love to you ; talked of his prospects—of his regard for you—for your father—and of his wish that you should be mistress of this house?'

'Oh, madam,' exclaimed Isabel, 'if you knew how distasteful that conversation was to me, you would not come hither to reproach me with a scene in which I bore only an involuntary part. He did indeed ask me to become his wife ; but

with such abruptness and with so little delicacy that I felt it not as an honour, but a cruel insult.'

'Had he never spoken to you in private before?'

'Never.'

'And did you encourage him in anything?'

'In nothing, on my honour. I could not love him; and I implored him to desist. It was your approach which interrupted him. But he desired me to speak with my papa.'

'Was it for this you were waiting?'

'Yes; but only to ask him to let me leave here.'

'Your father may refuse—may laugh at your scruples, and urge the colonel's suit himself.'

'Impossible,' retorted Isabel, with an earnestness which startled her visitor. 'He would not wish me to stay in a house where every hour would now be painful to me.'

'Poor girl!' said the older lady, and she kissed her companion on the forehead with a tenderness that made Isabel shudder; for there was an instinctive dread in her mind that perhaps her visitor had already spoken to her father, and that he had refused to shield her from this annoyance.

'Oh, no! no! no!' she exclaimed, 'this can-

not be!' but just then she remembered the strange look of curiosity and satisfaction with which he had regarded her when she returned from the garden, and she covered her face with her hands.

'Look up, my dear girl,' said Mrs. Carew; 'you must face this matter boldly. It will want all your courage and address. You are betrayed, insulted, trafficked in on all hands. I have proof of it in my possession; but unhappily I dare not give it you. Tell me this, do you believe I am your friend?'

'You have seemed so,' replied Isabel, 'but all is strange and cold to me now. I know not whom to trust, nor whither to fly. What is this secret which you hint at, and yet dare not tell me? Oh, madam, speak—pray speak, and let me judge for myself whether you are indeed my friend.'

Her visitor hesitated for a moment, but in fact she had made up her mind that she had no choice but to show her the letter on such terms of secrecy as she could make.

'You must promise me first to be discreet,' said the wily mother. 'I am risking much for your welfare, but I could not see you bartered away in this heartless fashion, and not give you a warning. Will you promise to observe secrecy?'



‘I will,’ replied Isabel—‘that is, if no duty forbids it.’

‘Duty cannot require you to divulge a service which would lead, if known, to an estrangement between a mother and her only son,’ answered the other; ‘though,’ she added with an apparent effort, ‘that son may be a cruel and a worthless one, and altogether unworthy of her love. But I think I may trust to your generosity, and tell you all.’

Isabel regarded her intently as she placed her hand in her pocket and produced the letter.

‘It is here,’ she said. ‘A letter from my son to a scoundrelly usurer in London, who supplies his profligacy with money, and fattens on his vices. How it came into my hands matters not. There is no breach of confidence in your reading it. I give it to you freely, and trust in your honour not to betray me, but to hand it back to me to-night without permitting mortal eye to see it, save your own. You must not even mention it or say where you have obtained this information. A word from you would ruin me. I place my happiness boldly in your hands. Here is the letter. Take it. Read it this night, for it concerns you more than me. And when you have read it, think into what a trap you might have fallen, and thank a poor, broken-

hearted, but still foolish mother, who, perhaps, saved you from the misery of being persuaded into a union which would assuredly have borne bitter fruits.'

Isabel was amazed and bewildered by this appeal. She took the letter tremblingly.

'Now good-night for a while,' said the mother. 'I shall be missed in the drawing-room. Before bed-time come to my room and let us talk again.'

Isabel held the letter in her hands for some time after her visitor had left. She was haunted by a dread which she had scarcely dared to avow to herself, but which had returned to her with redoubled force now she found herself alone.

'Can it be possible,' she asked herself bitterly, 'that I have no true friend in the world save this stranger, who has but just received me under her roof?'

She unfolded the paper and read it again and again before she fully comprehended its contents. The heartless insults, the cold, selfish calculations of the broken spendthrift, horse-racer and gambler, were no more to her than the hollow protestations of love which had fallen on her ear that night, or the offensive ease and assurance of the colonel towards her. It was the

thought that her father had lent himself to this unholy bargain that crushed her to the earth. The slight hints that Mrs. Clayter had given her aboard the hatchboat recurred to her mind ; numberless little signs in her father's manner and discourse when discussing their proposed visit to Borley also crowded upon her memory. Were these mere accidents ? Was she going mad with the thought of this humiliation, and coining fancies out of her own brain ?

Sometimes she clung to the hope that they were indeed delusions ; that her father knew nothing of these things, and that the assertions of the writer of this letter were calumnies invented to cheat his correspondent into lending him the money, which was the avowed object of his confidences. 'What if my father has been slandered ?' she thought. 'Am I doing my duty in believing these charges on the evidence of a man whose own mother denounces him as a worthless profligate ? Oh, no ; I will not—I cannot believe it. I will see my father to-night, and tell him boldly how these doubts have haunted me. I cannot tell him of the letter, but I will let him know that I am aware of Colonel Carew's heartless schemes, and appeal to a father to protect me.'

She dried her eyes after a while, and grew

calmer. Then she listened again for her father's footstep on the stairs, but he did not retire till late that night. The colonel had given him in a whisper a more favourable account of the reception of his suit than the facts warranted. He told him that Isabel had expressed surprise at his abruptness, but that she had based her objections entirely on the ground of the shortness of their acquaintance. This was as much as Frere expected. 'The matter progresses,' he thought, and he chuckled in advance at the prospect of the success of his plans, and did his best to keep pace with the convivial habits of the colonel and his guests, who continued smoking, and drinking brandy, and talking of horses and boat-racing till long past the hour at which the lawyer generally retired.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

FREE was more than ordinarily excited when he ascended to his room that night. The conversation of the colonel and his brother officers had not interested him much, but he had consoled himself in the society of the Honourable Mrs. Carew, whose mature good sense and polished manners delighted him. Now her triumph seemed assured, she was cheerful, communicative, and amusing as usual. Indeed, her equanimity and self-command had never been disturbed save for that brief period between her discovery of the colonel and Isabel in the garden and the arrival of Cousins' packet; and neither Frere nor Carew had noted any change. With such skill, indeed, had she concealed her feelings, that Frere even regarded her as friendly, and but for the colonel's instructions, would have made a confidante of her that very night. In addition to these causes of inward satisfaction, he had that night drunk more wine than was his custom. He was in general an

abstemious man, but it is a poor heart which cannot rejoice on a fitting occasion ; and the lawyer was in no mood to deny himself an indulgence.

He had scarcely sat down in his dressing-room, where he designed to write one or two letters before retiring, when he was disturbed by a tapping at the door. It was Isabel. Her pallid face and anxious look struck him forcibly as he opened the door to her, and stood there with the candle in his hand.

‘What is it, Belle?’ he inquired. ‘Come in and tell me.’

Isabel entered, and closed the door behind her.

‘I could not rest without speaking to you,’ she said. ‘I come to entreat you to take me away from here, where I can stay no longer without shame and humiliation.’

‘What is all this?’ asked the father. ‘What shame and humiliation can there be in being the honoured guests of Colonel Carew and his good mother?’

‘Colonel Carew,’ she faltered, ‘has spoken to me to-night of love, has offered me marriage——’

‘Is that a reason for running away?’ he interrupted with a laugh, which sounded strangely

in her ears. 'Come, now, is that a reason, I ask? The colonel is a gentleman, and he loves you. What is there wonderful in that?'

'Oh, papa,' exclaimed the daughter, 'a horrible idea has haunted me this night. Do not let me believe that it is anything more than an evil fancy. Forgive me! I thought that you cared no longer for your daughter's honour; that you would bring her to this place to be the theme of idle tongues, and to be insulted by one who, while he plays the part of lover, does not take the pains even to conceal his contempt for us. Oh, speak! Do say something. Tell me I am foolish, undutiful—say I am mad to harbour such a thought.'

She held out her arms wildly as if to embrace him as of old, but the father recoiled. He bent low and looked at her steadily from under his grey, shaggy eyebrows, with an angry expression which compelled her to shrink. His whole attitude repelled her, and she sunk into a chair, and hiding her face, sobbed aloud.

'Mad, indeed, I think you,' said Frere, who was but little moved by the spectacle of her distress; 'but, thank heaven, I am sane enough. This match was of my making. I avow it. I planned it for your good. The colonel is a great prize for you. This connection, more-

over, is necessary to my arrangements in a matter on which large sums are at stake. Do you hear? Go now to bed, and think of this. Get over these foolish antipathies if you can, or you may find me as harsh as I have hitherto been kind.'

Isabel rose slowly. Her tears ceased now, for another passion had taken possession of her whole soul. The affection that she had felt for her father was in a moment turned to scorn. She felt that she stood alone in the world; but the feeling gave her a consciousness of self-reliance which she had never known before. She cast upon him a look of disgust and pity, which made him shrink for a moment, and then turned and left his room without another word. Frere knew well that his cherished scheme was at an end. From the moment that she had unmasked him, indeed, he had been aware that it was hopeless; but he was too angry to let reasonable counsels prevail. He had attempted to coerce her, and Isabel's nature, as he knew, was not to be coerced. He was powerless, he reflected, but he could punish her. Mingled with his vexation at the failure of his plans was a secret feeling of shame at the thought that, irritated by her opposition, and excited by drinking, he had revealed frankly to her all



his crafty calculations. He knew she would despise him for his meanness ; and he felt in his heart that he could repay her contempt with indifference and neglect — even with hatred, if this estrangement lasted.

As for Isabel, it seemed to her as if that night had changed her whole nature. ‘The poorest wretch on earth,’ she thought, ‘is not poorer than I am now in all that makes life endurable.’ There was no friend at hand to guide or help her ; but she determined to think and act for herself. She restored to Mrs. Carew the letter that night, but told her nothing of what had passed between her father and her. In truth, she was no longer the dependent girl who had leaned upon the older woman for support.

The next day she kept her room ; but her father took little notice of her absence. He merely excused her to the colonel on the ground of some slight indisposition. He was resolved to check her haughty spirit by compelling her to remain there until the day which he had fixed for their departure.

Meditating on these things in her lonely room, Isabel was reminded of many a dark hint she had heard of her father’s harshness, of many a sign of a certain repugnance in those who came in contact with him which had escaped her,

scarcely heeded before. 'Can it be true?' she thought, 'that my father, whom I have loved and honoured, is thus despised by the world with justice? Ah me! the thought will break my heart.' Her tears flowed again, and she flung herself upon her bed and held her hands to her eyes, to shut out the hateful daylight and the world on which it shone.

Then she thought once more of Carrell; of his kindness and patience; and of that delicacy and self-respect with which he had approached her; thought of the dignity of his sacrifice, and contrasted it with the vulgar assurance of the colonel's false declarations—the selfishness, the meanness, the hypocrisy with which she was surrounded in that hateful place. And ever associated with him was the story of their adventure on the sea, and that still greater romance, his strange disguise, which had failed to conceal even from the poor bargeman's wife his superiority to those around him. Sometimes the fancy would enter her mind that he had concealed his name and station for the sake of the triumph of winning her in that humble guise, like the heroes of some old ballads she remembered. But rich or poor, humble or exalted, he grew hourly nobler in her eyes. What would she not have given for the power

to open her heart to him? His counsel was the only one she craved for now. 'But he is gone for ever,' she reflected. 'I was unkind and harsh. I trampled on him, and he could not bear to meet or see me, except in that stealthy farewell when he stood by the gate. He was going to London to resume his old life. Even if I could write or convey a message to Claytersville, it would probably be of no avail.'

Her face flushed crimson at this thought, and though there was no eye there to mark her, she felt abashed. In truth, her resolution was taken. She would write that day. If he had departed, the Stedmans might possibly know where to forward her letter. So she sat down and penned a brief note, expressing a hope that she might one day see him again, and hinting at her trouble and her need of a friend so faithful as he had proved himself.

She tore up her letter, and re-wrote it again and again; for it seemed to her each time too cold and formal; yet when she had made it more kind in its expressions, and had sealed it, her heart beat faster, and her face flushed once more. For she thought of the doubt which Mrs. Stedman's words had thrown upon his love for her. She scarcely cared to conceal the fact that her heart now turned towards him with a

feeling that was stronger than mere friendship ; but what if her own vanity only had prompted her interpretation of his embarrassment when they parted, and the circumstance of his watching for their carriage on the day when they left Claytersville ? This struggle in her mind was soon over. 'Let it go,' she thought. 'Why should I hesitate ? Can I fall lower than I have fallen, lingering still in this place, where those who should protect me have made me a mark for the ridicule and contempt of the basest of the base ? Better Ishmael's pity than the scorn of such as these. Better ! ay,' she cried aloud, in the anguish of her heart, 'better a thousand times !'

Ishmael before. 'It is not a common one,' he reflected, 'and it looks odd outside a lady's letter; but somehow it seems familiar to me. I wish I had time to consult Goldney.'

Mr. Widgett had naturally an inquisitive mind, which had been fostered by the nature of his new employment. Anything that struck him as unusual was a thing to be considered and reconciled with ordinary human affairs, or else enquired into further at the first opportunity. So it happened that this matter furnished him with abundant occupation for the mind until the approach of evening, when his weary horse walked slowly down the main street of Claytersville, and drew up with his rider in front of the Royal Hotel.

Widgett was not in the habit of making a fuss about business which he undertook. He made no enquiries, but following the instructions he had received, walked down the street, and across the fields to Stedman's cottage.

It was 'growing dusk as he arrived at the house, and entered the garden by a little wicket-gate. He saw the creek beyond, the hatchboat, and the barge, which was evidently just loaded for a voyage. Then he walked round the house, and, attracted by voices, looked through a window where he could see into a room with-

out being seen. There were two persons there, an old man and a young man. Both were in seamen's attire. The face of the younger one attracted his attention as he scrutinised it closely by the light of a candle which shone upon the stranger's features.

Widgett whistled a whistle inaudible to any one but himself. 'I know that face,' he muttered; 'and shan't forget it this side of the next world.' Then he whistled again in the same peculiar way. 'What a pity I've no warrant about me,' he thought. He had made up his mind it was the younger man to whom the letter that he carried was addressed; but he determined not to deliver his missive that day at least. In fact, of so little importance did a young lady's letter appear to him compared with other matters which now occupied his thoughts, that he thrust the epistle into his pocket again, hastened back to the hotel, took a hasty meal, saw his horse fed and rubbed down, and, tired and jaded as the animal was, mounted him again, and started homewards. He spurred the poor beast onward till late into the night, when he arrived at Borley.

Widgett sought a private interview with the regimental sergeant-major the next day, who despatched the trusty Widgett with a

corporal and two privates, the latter bearing their carbines and rounds of ammunition. The two men primed and loaded under the corporal's order.

'Corporal,' said the sergeant, 'here are your instructions from the adjutant's office. You will see to their execution.'

'Very good,' replied the corporal.

Then whispering to Widgett, the sergeant reminded him that this man had escaped from military arrest, and could therefore be brought back without a magistrate's order.

'All right, sergeant,' replied Widgett, and the group departed as cheerfully as if starting on an excursion of pleasure.

Meanwhile, Carrell lingered in Claytersville, knowing nothing of Isabel's change of feeling towards him, or of the strange destiny by which that change had become the forerunner of his ruin. The vacillation of Captain Clayter had delayed the departure of the barge, and the repairs of the hatchboat, rendered necessary by the damage done by the storm, had furnished additional employment for him. In this way the days had passed until the hatchboat was completed, and the barge loaded and ready to sail.

It was on the morning fixed for his departure that Carrell was carrying a chest across the garden in the direction of the barge, when a stealthy footstep behind him attracted his attention. It was that of a man who had just entered the gate unobserved, and who had taken off his shoes to walk on the gravel-path. Before Carrell could turn with his load, a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

‘Come, my lad,’ said this stranger. ‘No chase through the fields this time. You had best have the darbies on and go quietly.’

Carrell dropped his load, and turning, recognised the officer from whom he had escaped in Canvey Island. It was no other than Mr. Widgett, whose peculiar business, since he had left the army, was that of tracking out and arresting deserters from Borley.

Quick as thought, Carrell seized the man round the arms, and pressing his chin into his chest, threw him on to the ground. Then he resorted to the tactics which had served him so often before. He bounded over the garden fence, sprang on to the barge, thence on to the hatchboat which was moored alongside her, and finally jumped down on to the dry mud of the shore. Beyond this was the brick-field. But Mr. Widgett had prepared for this



policy. Ambitious of the glory of arresting so notorious a deserter, and confident of his arrangements for capturing him if he should attempt to run in the direction of the town, he had persuaded the soldiers to remain in ambush within range, behind a stack of bricks at the other side of the narrow creek, which was then nearly dry. 'If he should run,' said the sagacious Widgeott, 'it can only be that way. But mark me, he will come like a lamb now we've got him here.'

One half of Mr. Widgeott's prediction was verified, as we have seen; and that half was enough to render escape impossible. As he stepped up the bank, the corporal and two men stood forward from their cover, and summoned him to surrender.

'Never,' cried Carrell, as he drew his knife again, and unclasped it.

One of the men made a gesture, as if about to close with him; but the clear voice of the corporal crying 'Halt!' arrested his movement.

'There shall be no blood spilt to-day, unless it's the blood of this madman,' said the corporal. 'Soldiers, make ready—present!'

The men stood erect and levelled their carbines at the deserter.

'Surrender!' cried the corporal; but instead

of obeying the summons the young man planted his back firmly against a stack of bricks, and claspings his knife in his right hand, surveyed the men with an air of defiance.

‘Do your duty, comrades,’ he cried. ‘I am prepared. Come, here is a mark for you,’ he shouted, as he pulled open his canvas shirt, and pointed to the fatal letter on his breast. ‘Aim here, where “Bloodhound Jackson” marked me for one of the black sheep of Borley fold.’

The corporal hesitated a moment. He was a rough soldier, but he preferred not to slay a comrade in cold blood if he could help it.

‘Take a minute,’ he cried. ‘You’ll be cooler then; but if you stir, or attempt to escape, by heaven you are a dead man.’

Carrell laughed a scornful laugh. ‘Is that all?’ he asked, as he watched them with flashing eyes, while he flourished his knife in the air with a rapidity which threatened death to any one who had ventured to close with him; ‘now, then, to bring this parley to an end.’

With this he made a rapid movement, as if to turn the angle of the pile of bricks, and fly. But the crisis had come.

‘Fire!’ cried the corporal.

There was a double flash, a rolling sound, and all was wrapped in smoke. As the light

wind carried the vapour away, the form of the deserter became visible, bent and motionless on the ground.

A soldier raised him, but his head drooped, and his body hung heavy in his arms. The blood was flowing freely from a wound in the chest. There was another in his thigh, from which the blood was soaking through the canvas of his trousers.

‘Is there no docthor nigh at hand?’ asked the soldier who had raised him, and who was an Irishman.

The corporal looked at the wounded man for a moment with a professional eye, raised his arm, let it fall again, and shook his head.

‘Poor lad,’ he said, with something like a tone of compassion. ‘He’ll want no more doctors in this world.’

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A FRIEND AT COURT.

‘It was his own obstinacy, thank God,’ said the corporal, ‘but it’s a pity.’

The cause of the corporal’s sudden burst of compassion was a kind of remorse which perhaps only a soldier can understand. The fact of having shot a deserter who had defied them to the last, and had finally attempted to escape after due warning, would have seemed to him a small matter. It was the circumstance that both his men, instead of one only, had fired on the deserter which weighed upon his conscience as a soldier. The truth was, that he had at first expected to overawe his prisoner by a mere display of force, and had given the order to fire in the hurry of Carrell’s attempt to escape, which left him no time for reflection. Now this, though of little moment to the wounded man, was with the corporal a distinction of great importance. One of his men had humanely dropped his carbine and fired low, but this did not affect the case in the

corporal's eyes, for the fact of two men having deliberately fired on one at close quarters would, he knew, be regarded as cowardly and unsoldier-like.

'I gave him time to surrender,' said the corporal musingly, as the soldier who was supporting the head of the wounded man wiped the blood upon his breast to examine the wound.

'Sure enough,' said the soldier who had suggested the fetching of a surgeon; 'but the boy's moaning. Don't move him, only fetch a docthor.'

The corporal despatched the other man for aid. 'Be sharp, Osborne,' he said, 'though,' he added, 'you might as well fetch an undertaker at once.'

Meanwhile the Stedmans, aroused by the scuffle and the report of fire-arms, had hastened to the spot. The scene before them told the old man at once the true story of their unfortunate guest.

'Poor boy,' said the bargeman. 'Deserted, did he? and was that all he'd done to be shot like a dog?' and the worthy pair fell a-crying over him, kneeling down and kissing his hands as if the wounded man had been their own son.

'You'd better get water, and some cloths to stanch this blood,' said the corporal.

'Run, missis,' said Stedman to his wife. 'I may be of use here, and women go fainting sometimes over the sight of blood.'

Mrs. Stedman wanted no second order; she hastened back by way of the creek, for the tide was out and the water had dwindled to a little rivulet, meandering through the middle of the sand and mud of the channel. Like a good country housewife of the old school, she was never without certain cordials and other things necessary for such cases of emergency, and she soon returned with all the articles which the corporal had asked for.

Carrell still moaned faintly from time to time.

'Look ye here, corporal,' said the Irish soldier, 'did ye ever see a boy raise his arm a quarter of an hour after he'd been shot through the lungs? Jist look at 'm now.'

The wounded man raised his right hand slowly, and clutching the front of his shirt, made a movement as if to cover his breast.

'Ay, that's their way when they're asleep and dreaming that somebody's spying secrets,' said the corporal. 'It's the mark he's wanting to hide.'

Then Mrs. Stedman, bending low and watch-

ing him fondly for some further sign of life, heard him murmur the word 'Isabel.' She said nothing to those around her, but she treasured up this fact, and afterwards pondered upon it until she perceived its true significance.

In a little while the private who had been despatched for aid returned with an old naval surgeon named Spilsby, who had taken up his abode in Claytersville. Spilsby had retired from his profession, but did not refuse to come in a case of such urgency. He had seen many a gunshot-wound, and he examined both the wounds which Carrell had received with close attention.

'This one in the thigh is but a trifle,' said the doctor; 'if he lives after a ball through the chest, 'twill be a proof that miracles are not come to an end. And yet I've seen that before now, when a man's healthy and strong.'

Under the surgeon's directions Stedman formed a litter with a piece of sail-cloth and two oars, and having raised the wounded man gently upon this, they carried him across the dry creek to the bargeman's cottage.

'We must march to-night with him, doctor,' said the corporal, after they had laid Carrell on a bed, 'unless he's like to die on the road.'

‘Like to die!’ exclaimed the doctor; ‘’twill be murder if you carry him half a mile.’

‘Write your certificate, doctor,’ said the corporal, who was secretly glad of this excuse for showing mercy to his prisoner. ‘Give the word, and I promise you the man shan’t be moved till I get further orders.’

The surgeon wrote his memorandum, certifying that Edward Carrell had received two gunshot-wounds; that one was in the thigh, and that there was no need to describe it; and ‘that the other was a wound of a very serious character, which would probably prove fatal, the ball having entered the left side of the chest, where the bone and cartilage of the seventh true rib unite, and come out in the situation of the angle of the same bone.’ This wound, the doctor certified, would render it impossible to move him at present without bringing on symptoms which would in all probability end in death. That night a close sentry was placed in the room of the wounded man, with strict orders to fire upon any one attempting to rescue him.

Meanwhile, Carrell had slightly revived under the stimulants which the doctor had prescribed; but he breathed heavily and spat blood.



‘Don’t cry, mother,’ said the old surgeon kindly to Mrs. Stedman. ‘Blood-spitting is a bad sign, you know, but I’ve seen many a man live to dance a hornpipe after it.’

The surgeon dressed the wounds and left his patient for awhile. Mrs. Stedman sat beside the bed and tended him according to the surgeon’s directions. The bargeman had been anxious to undertake that duty; but his wife had resolutely asserted her right, as a woman skilled in the ways of sick people, to perform it unaided. So Stedman, having got permission to delay his voyage, took to smoking in the garden below, and walking about the house in an uneasy manner, and worrying the sentry that night for such frequent bulletins of the patient’s condition as ensured vigilance on the part of that worthy Irishman, who, having heard the surgeon’s dictum that the wounded man could not be moved, was under a strong temptation to indulge in a nap before his comrade’s hour for relieving him arrived.

‘Softly now,’ said the sentry after numerous interruptions of this kind: then, winking his eye at Carrell’s nurse, for the rough soldier was a wit in his way, he added, ‘Don’t you persuade that you’re depriving a poor crature of sleep?’ an admonition which, being understood

by Stedman as referring to the wounded man, was sufficient to secure peace and retirement to the sentry for the remainder of his time of duty.

But his kindly nurse took no rest while the death of her charge seemed imminent. She watched him incessantly for any sign of improvement, while she moistened his lips from time to time, or gave him such nourishment as the doctor would permit. Often she thought of that one word, 'Isabel,' breathed in her ear in what seemed the very moment of death so faintly, that it had been inaudible to all but her; and coupling it with that convulsive movement by which he had sought to conceal the fatal sign of his disgrace, she divined the romance of his life now with a surer instinct than when she had reasoned on the facts of their rescuing him from the river.

'Poor lad,' she thought; 'so it was not for the sake of any young lady after all, but to get away from these murderers, that he tried to drown himself in Sea Reach; and now he has fallen in love with Miss Frere, who wouldn't look at a poor soldier, I dare say, though he saved her life.'

Carrell's strong and healthy frame, his temperate habits, and constant labour in the open

air, were all favourable to his recovery, as the doctor had anticipated. On the third day after the struggle in the brick-field the crisis seemed to have passed. Surgeon Spilsby pronounced the case to be progressing favourably.

‘In ten days or less,’ he said to his patient, ‘you’ll find your sufferings abated.’

Carrell smiled faintly, in token of thanks; but the news brought him no comfort. He knew very well that his recovery would be followed by a court-martial, and by that degradation compared with which death would have been welcome.

‘Let me die, doctor,’ he said faintly. ‘It is but a flicker of life you are keeping alive. You don’t know what you do.’

Spilsby held his finger to his lips to enjoin silence, and whispered—

‘Surely you’ve suffered enough. They’ll be satisfied now. Listen to me,’ he said, dropping his voice. ‘Don’t be exciting yourself now. I’ve a good bit of news for you, and it may help to keep you up. But do you think you can bear it quietly? Move your hand if you do.’

Carrell did as he was directed, and listened.

‘Well, then, I have heard about it from Widgett, who knows everything that stirs at

Borley. I tell you, you have a friend at court, my lad.'

Carrell smiled faintly and shook his head.

'But I tell you you have,' continued the surgeon. 'The commandant is going to marry a young and rich lady, who is sure to intercede for you. If she is as pretty as they say she's good, she won't plead in vain. They'll find some way of evading the sentence, mark me. After all, the great folks contrive things as they please.'

'Why should any one intercede for me?' murmured Carrell.

'Speaking is contrary to orders,' interrupted the worthy doctor, 'and, besides, we shall be overheard by our friend the sentry. Only listen quietly, and you shall hear all.' Then he brought his mouth closer to Carrell's ear and whispered, 'There's a lady who owes you a debt of gratitude. You know her. You cannot have forgotten the hatchboat!'

The wounded man made an attempt to raise himself upon one elbow. He stared wildly about him; some mist was before his eyes which obscured the form of him whose words had moved him; but by an effort his vision became more distinct, and he finally fixed upon the surgeon a gaze which appalled him. The

face of his patient had grown so wan and bloodless that it seemed as if the final moment had come.

‘Who is this friend?’ he asked in a hoarse whisper, which brought on an ominous gasping for breath.

‘Miss Frere,’ said the doctor in a lower whisper.

Mrs. Stedman, who had heard the latter part of their dialogue, hurried across the room and placed her hand upon his arm.

‘Doctor, doctor,’ she said, ‘you don’t know what you do. Look there; cannot you see you are killing my poor boy?’

The effort had exhausted his patient. Carrell’s eyes retained their glassy stare, but his jaw fell, and his head sank backwards on the pillow as if in the faintness of death.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## MR. WIDGETT'S REMORSE.

WIDGETT had indeed picked up this piece of news in Borley, where the Honourable Mrs. Carew had at first failed to discover it. His informant was the love-sick Clara, whom he had enlisted in his service as a collector of information, and who had carried her zeal so far as even to listen one night to a conversation between Frere and his client in the verandah. She had heard that all was actually arranged for the marriage, which was to take place at no distant date; and this information she had faithfully conveyed to the admiring Widgett, who saw no reason for keeping secret what in a few days, as he reflected, must become known to all the world.

The rapidity with which events had followed each other, and the excitement consequent on the sudden discovery of Carrell's lurking-place, had hitherto left Mr. Widgett no time for reflection. But it happened that a calmer survey of the position of affairs, aided by the light of

Clara's information, sufficed entirely to change the direction of his ideas, and to work a complete revolution in his view of the situation.

On the day of the arrest he had ascertained that Edward Carrell the deserter was, beyond question, identical with the Ishmael to whom Isabel's confidential note was addressed. Having enquired further, and learnt from Stedman the whole story of the hatchboat, and Isabel's escape from the perils at sea under Carrell's care, he became still further convinced that the man who had given him so much trouble, and who seemed now in so pitiable a plight, was a very important personage indeed, and even in a fair way to fortune.

To tell the truth, Mr. Widgett was not solely dependent for information on Clara's enterprise. He was not a scrupulous person, or one who was encumbered, in his investigations into secrets of importance, by any high standard of honour. While riding back to Borley to communicate the intelligence of Carrell's arrest, he had taken the liberty of pulling out of his pocket Isabel's undelivered letter, and of making himself master of its contents, by a process of unsealing and sealing again in which frequent practice had rendered him remarkably skilful.

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The contents of Isabel's letter caused Mr. Widgeff still greater uneasiness. There was, it is true, a certain tenderness in it which did not fail to strike his experienced mind; but a love affair between Carrell and the rich young lady who had come with her father to Borley, and was actually affianced to the heir to the title and estates of Lord Carew, was too absurd an idea to be entertained by that intelligent officer. Moreover, the colonel's mother was certainly informed by Isabel on the subject. It was the Honourable Mrs. Carew, indeed, who had first employed him in this business, and who had described the letter to Clara as a confidential one, which could only be entrusted to a discreet and trustworthy hand. For these good reasons Mr. Widgeff, who was unskilled in the lore of love, interpreted the tenderness of the epistle as a mere token of her obligations to one who had saved her from death.

'A discreet and trustworthy hand, humph!' muttered Mr. Widgeff sarcastically, as he mounted again and allowed his horse to walk gently with slackened rein through the green lanes. 'Very discreet and very trustworthy I have been. I am afraid I have made but a bad job of this confidential business.'

He continued his meditations on this subject



during the remainder of his ride, but his sagacious mind was not able to perceive any probable issue which would be in the slightest degree satisfactory to himself.

‘It is a sad mess,’ he thought, ‘make what one will of it, for there is the unpleasant discovery which I have made for them, that their young friend is one of the most desperate of our black sheep. That, to be sure, may change their opinion of the gentleman, but the women-folks are sure to pity him now he’s shot; and if he lives, what a hubbub there’ll be about a court-martial and a flogging for the young lady’s deliverer.’

On the whole, Mr. Widgeott came to the painful conclusion that many weeks would not have rolled over his head before Borley would have become too hot to hold him. Anyway, it would be a disagreeable incident on the very eve of the colonel’s marriage, and one which might lead to results which even his genius for intrigue might fail to foresee. But of one thing he felt certain; and that was, that his engagement with Clara was placed in immediate jeopardy. What would Mrs. Carew, who had promised him a handsome reward for his pains, say to his blundering zeal? What would the lady who was soon to be the reigning queen

over Borley think now of the discretion of her messenger?

All the circumstances of the case, indeed, seemed to have conspired to convince Mr. Widgett that he had been guilty of a series of blunders, which might have disastrous consequences for himself. He knew that it was impossible to conceal from Mrs. Carew the fact that he had not performed the object of his errand; and he determined, therefore, to seek out that lady, and to throw himself on her mercy at once. Accordingly, he had no sooner dismounted from his horse and seen it safely sheltered in the barrack-stables, than he proceeded to her apartments, and, in a private interview, related the extraordinary incidents of the last two days.

That ingenious lady was not long in betraying to the unfortunate Widgett the fact that the news which he had brought was anything but welcome to her. The whole affair, indeed, was just one of those contretemps which she dreaded. 'It is the misfortune of employing people of this kind,' she thought; 'that they involve one in scrapes which all the wit in the world cannot guard against.'

Mr. Widgett was crestfallen, as one who feels that he has failed to sustain his reputation in

a great emergency. He was not naturally of a voluble turn. Indeed, he was, as a rule, somewhat taciturn ; but being conscious that his quiet manners created a prejudice against him in society, he had acquired a notion that the only way to ingratiate himself with strangers was to be garrulous and communicative in matters of little moment : so he hung his head low and said—

‘ You see, madam, he was such a notorious fellow. Twice escaped. Gave us the slip in Bemfleet, when we were standing with a corporal and two men outside the watch-house. Just as we were going to clap the darbies on, madam, he slips in again, closes the door in our faces, and away through the back, and vanishes like a puff of smoke in the air. It was magic. Only think, four to one, and couldn’t find a trace of him. Hear of him next, madam, weeks and weeks afterwards, as having been seen that morning going down the marsh-way where the navvies were at work. Knew his game, of course : deserters always do try to get work at the excavations. It’s generally off the main road, you see, madam, and then nobody asks any questions in that employment, if your back is strong enough, which our men’s seldom is, not being used to it. But I beg

pardon, these are not things that ladies care to hear.'

Mrs. Carew, who had been trifling with a dry pen over a sheet of note-paper at her little *escritoire* during this harangue, was in fact listening attentively, and was really curious about the history of the man with whom Isabel Frere appeared to have had a kind of sentimental engagement.

'Go on,' she said; 'I will tell you at once if it wearies me.'

Thus encouraged, Widdett proceeded. 'Well, my lady,' he continued, waxing more polite, as he began to perceive that he was making a good impression on his hearer, 'I think you will say, when you have condescended to hear me, that I could not do any other than I did. For when my comrade and I came down upon him, he drew his knife and wanted to fight, set the blackguards in the cutting on to us, and then slipped away, and ran me a good five miles through the marshes: such a run, my lady, as I never hope to have again, though I used to be known as a match for any man, down Mersea Island way, which is my country, madam.'

'Yes, yes,' interrupted the lady impatiently; 'but tell me, how did he escape you after all?'

Widgett was quick-witted enough to perceive that his questioner desired to hear less about himself and more about the object of his chase.

‘Oh, the man, my lady,’ he said. ‘He turned upon me once, as if to show fight, but thought better of it, and so kept on till he came to a creek, where he dived in and swam for it. For you see he was barefooted, and hardly a rag of clothing on him, while I had my heavy boots, and I’m not much of a swimmer. Besides, I was exhausted, and it was fast getting dusk. So I gave up the run, pretty sure of finding him starving about that way before many days; for a wilder bit of country you won’t well find in this county.’

The Honourable Mrs. Carew having possessed herself of these facts, turned her mind to the consideration of the position of affairs. She feared the consequences of the fact becoming known to her son that she had intrigued with Isabel for the purpose of conveying a letter to such a rival. It was painful to her feelings to have to trust to a man like Widgett; but her decisive judgment enabled her to perceive at once that there was no other course.

‘Widgett,’ said the lady, in a voice that impressed her hearer more than ever with the



gravity of the situation, 'you have done your duty, no doubt, but this is not the less an unfortunate business. Miss Frere is not likely to hear of this affair, for she has been confined to her room with indisposition for some days, and will leave here shortly. The cause of her receiving no reply to her letter will not be known to her, unless some gossip of the barracks should reach her, which we must endeavour to prevent. The shock would be too great for her, for she is under great obligations to this man. There is your reward.'

She placed in the officer's hand two sovereigns, which he deposited with grateful acknowledgments in a leathern purse. In truth, he had begun to regard his promised reward as in the highest degree problematical.

'No word shall come from me, my lady,' he remarked.

'And now,' continued the lady, 'show your discretion, and everything will go well. As for this man—I mean the deserter—the matter must take its course. He will probably die, or if not, will meet his punishment like a brave man. That is all; but remember that there is no reason to tell how you discovered him. That is an affair between you and me. To divulge it would give pain in certain quarters

infallible military signs of short hair and an erect figure. 'Can it be that they know anything about him which is unknown to his comrades?'

A little enquiry seemed to unfold to the over-cunning Widgeott still further mysteries. He too learnt that Carrell, while in the army, had always been remarked as a man superior to his station; and that he had enlisted when a mere youth, and given to no one an account of his connections. He was known for his great strength and agility, and his fondness for outdoor exercises; but when no contests of this kind were going on, he had always been a man of retired habits, mixing, at least, very little with his comrades. It was this fact, indeed, which had rendered him unpopular, and had led to that persecution which finally drove him to insubordination and to flight.

There existed at that time at Borley a certain Sergeant Jackson, who was known among men who whispered under the sobriquet of 'Bloodhound Jackson.' This man, whose career would probably have been brought to a speedy close under the reign of any commandant less given to the absorbing pursuits of horse-racing and gambling in general than Mrs. Carew's son, was notorious for intriguing against any soldier who

happened to incur his displeasure. This was the enemy who had provoked Carrell, in a moment of frenzy, to an act which had compelled him to desert, and had finally driven him to the desperate resolve of meeting death rather than submit again to the ignominy of the soldier's punishment. Jackson, indeed, had been more than any other man enraged by the deserter's escape in the marsh. He hated him with the implacable hatred of wounded pride, for Carrell's education had led to his being employed in little matters for superior officers, and had brought him under their notice in a way that marked him for promotion. The cleverness of Widdett's discovery at Claytersville, however, had quite turned the current of Jackson's feeling, and Widdett found himself in especial favour with this petty tyrant.

Widdett's first thought was naturally to sound Jackson in a careless way about the deserter's history. Jackson saw nothing in this but what was natural. This man had been certainly the most notorious of all those whom the disorder prevailing at Borley had driven to rebellion—the most conspicuous victim of that system which had finally caused the services of Mr. Widdett and his companion, Goldney, to be in permanent requisition there. Jackson told him all that he



knew. Carrell, he said, was evidently a young scapegrace, who had cut adrift from his friends and connections, and enlisted in the army to save himself from something worse. 'We know this sort of man here, sir,' said Sergeant Jackson, with more oaths than need be set down; 'and what is more, we can tame him. The fellow thought himself a gentleman still, and forgot he was only a private soldier. But we have means here of bringing such customers to their senses, and, by Jove, we'll use them.'

This was but slight information, it is true; but it was sufficient for Widgett's purpose. Widgett delighted in speculations upon the history of people with whom he came in contact; but, like many men of his class, he had but a weak head for reasoning. He was apt to snap at an idea, and to hold fast to it; rapidly assimilating into his system any facts that came in his way which were favourable to it, but rejecting with equal readiness whatever happened to be of a contrary tendency.

The fact that Carrell was manifestly a gentleman by birth had already led other personages in this story into erroneous conclusions; but no one had been carried so far astray by that circumstance as Mr. Widgett, whose special business it was to detect truth. He carefully

put together in his head that night all the facts of the case which had come to his knowledge ; and being able to see no other solution of the mystery of the extraordinary interest which appeared to be shown by the colonel's mother and his intended bride in this young man, he came to the conclusion that they were cognisant of his origin ; that one or other was probably intimate with Carrell's relatives or friends—perhaps was actually herself related to him, and anxious by some arrangement to save him from falling to a still lower depth of degradation. Here was in his mind a theory which explained everything : the shelter accorded by the Stedmans ; the fact of Carrell's being so much in the society of Isabel at Claytersville ; his voyage with her in the hatchboat ; the secret letter ; and, finally, Mrs. Carew's dread lest Isabel should hear the disastrous news of the struggle in which he had been so mercilessly shot down.

It was true that the Honourable Mrs. Carew had spoken coldly of the prospect of Carrell's being tried by court-martial and condemned ; but it was evident that she regarded his death from the wounds he had received as a far more probable result of the affair. 'Moreover,' thought the far-seeing Widdett, 'there are ways of getting a young gentleman out of a scrape

when influence so powerful is at work. They may bring him to court-martial, but my name is not Joseph Widgett if Bloodhound Jackson gets him in his claws again. One day the bird will have flown, nobody will know how or why, and there'll be an end of this business.'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY  
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE  
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

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